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**ALICIA MARKOVA**











ALICIA MARKOVA

*Study by Jane Plotz*

# **ALICIA MARKOVA**

## **HER LIFE AND ART**

**BY**  
**ANTON DOLIN**

**ILLUSTRATED**

**HERMITAGE HOUSE • NEW YORK**

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**FIRST EDITION**

**Published simultaneously in Canada by**  
**George J. McLeod, Ltd., Toronto, Canada**

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*Markova's Life-Story in Pictures:  
A Photographic Sequence from Childhood to Fame  
Facing Page 64*





**ALICIA MARKOVA**





## PRELUDE



A chance remark overheard in the foyer of a London cinema prompted the writing of this book.

It was in January 1934. Markova and I a few days previously had inscribed on the pages of ballet history that we were the first two English artistes to dance the leading roles in *Giselle*, popularly known as the *Hamlet* of the ballet. We had won a victory for British dancing prestige, and felt rather as we imagined the Russian ballerina, Mathilde Kschessinska, might have felt that night on the Maryinsky stage in Imperial St. Petersburg when, equaling the feat of the Italian star, Pierrina Legnani, she executed the thirty-two fouettés.

The Sunday evening after our exciting and successful *Giselle* première, I called on Markova at her mother's flat at Marble Arch, overlooking Hyde Park. We discussed, with pardonable pride and happiness, the favorable week-end press criticisms, and then, agreeing we had earned a little relaxation

after the previous strenuous six weeks, I suggested we go off quietly and see a film at the Regal Cinema next door.

As we entered the foyer, we passed two young women standing by the box office, waiting for their escorts, who were purchasing tickets. One of them was obviously a balletomane, for I heard her whisper to her friend, "Look, there's Markova!" The other girl glanced quickly in Alicia's direction and replied, "It can't be. She's wearing a blouse and skirt!"

We laughed about the incident as we took our seats, but, going home later that evening, I thought what a pity it was that Alicia's public should know so little about her in particular, and dancers in general, that they should be surprised to see her in a blouse and skirt—and a rather elegant blouse and skirt at that! And I made up my mind that one day I would write a book about her, so that the world could really get to know Markova the woman, and not only the dancer, as an intimate friend.

The unsettled, wandering life of a dancer hardly makes the writing of a book an easy matter, and so years passed before I was able to put my thoughts, my remembrances, and my knowledge of the life of this great dancer on paper. However, I have the satisfaction of knowing that I am now in a position to give to the public a more complete book than would have been possible at the time of our first *Giselle*.

The real opportunity for getting down to the writing of this book did not occur until the latter half of 1949, when Alicia and I were in England, making a concert tour of the key cities in which we had not danced for eleven years.

Returning to London one week end, I decided to begin to write the story of Alicia Markova. Curious to see her birth

certificate—not that I thought it would provide me with any new information, but it seemed as good a way as any to start a biography—I made my way to Somerset House, where all the births, marriages, and deaths in the United Kingdom are recorded.

The certificate revealed that on the first day of December 1910 a daughter was born to Arthur Tristman Marks, a mining engineer, and his wife, Eileen Mary Ruth Marks, nee Barry, at 23 Wilberforce Road in the registration district of Hackney and the sub-district of Stoke Newington, in the County of London. She was named Lilian Alicia Marks.

Though I have been an intimate friend of the Marks family for the best part of thirty years, I had never seen the place where Alicia was born, so, on leaving Somerset House, I made my way to North London, just to get a glimpse of the house which may one day bear a plaque announcing that one of the world's greatest dancers made her first appearance under its roof.

The dull, overcast sky, typical of a London winter, was cheered by the paraffin flares of the Camden Town street barrows opposite the old Bedford Music Hall, where Marie Lloyd delighted applauding Edwardians with her saucy songs.

Soon the green trees of Finsbury Park and the lofty spire of the Finsbury Park Methodist Church, which stands on the corner of Wilberforce Road, came into view. Number 23, which the Marks family vacated soon after Alicia's birth, bore no evidence of being a distinguished monument in the history of ballet. The front of this ordinary three-story house consists, on the ground floor, of a bay window and front door, flanked by newly-painted cream pillars and approached by a path of

red and black tiles. There are two flat windows on the first floor and two more on the second. On either side of the entrance, in the little front garden, are miniature laurel trees. Next door I noticed a much more imposing detached house, where the great dancer, Adeline Genée, used to visit, while Mrs. Marks, one of her most devoted admirers, would peep shamelessly from behind her lace curtains as the idolized ballerina of the Empire Theatre in Leicester Square crossed the pavement from her car to her friend's house.

As I stood gazing at the house where Alicia was born, a young woman walked briskly up to the door, inserted her key in the lock, and hurried in. I wondered if she knew anything of the house in which she lived. She may have seen a poster a few yards away in the main road, announcing that Alicia Markova and Anton Dolin were to appear for a week at the Kilburn State Theatre, the largest auditorium in Europe. And if she had noticed it, I am sure the young woman would have been astonished to learn that the ballerina whose name was publicized in large letters of royal purple at the end of the road first saw the light of day in the house she was now entering.

However, nothing could be gained by daydreaming about the girl who had closed the front door on a stranger suspiciously looking up at her windows, and I finally made my way home.

Sitting down at my desk, I pondered the significance of the life I was about to record. Just for a moment I wondered whether I was the most suitable person to undertake the task. On further reflection, without any false modesty, I had to admit that, having been an eyewitness to most of the triumphs

in Alicia's spectacular career, I had an advantage over every other living person capable of writing her biography. I have been so near to her both as her friend and as her partner and have seen her—and still see her—pass most of the milestones to success. I did not have to collect evidence from relatives, friends, letters, and press reports, and then try to picture how she felt on the great occasions when she helped to make ballet history. In most instances I shared those occasions with her on the stage, or else was present to see what was happening with my own eyes. I did not have to imagine how she felt—I nearly always knew—for she generally confided in me as one who loved her, who knew all about the ballet, and could sympathize, help, and advise her.

Even before I knew her, I had seen Alicia, at the age of ten, make her earliest professional appearance in public as *première danseuse* in a London pantomime. We met soon afterward as fellow students at the London dance studio of Seraphine Astafieva, where this wonder child amazed experienced professional ballet dancers by her fantastic technique. When, for the first time, I used the name of Anton Dolin at a charity performance at the Royal Albert Hall, twelve-year-old Alicia was on the same program, dancing for the first time at a public performance, *The Dying Swan*. I was with the Diaghileff Ballet when she joined the company at Monte Carlo. Four years later we first danced together in public during the last Diaghileff Ballet season at Covent Garden, just before Diaghileff died.

When Alicia returned to England to make her contribution toward the establishment of the Sadler's Wells Ballet, I was her partner on many occasions, including that historic night

when *Giselle* was first danced by an English company. We were also together at the head of our own Markova-Dolin Ballet, which did so much valuable pioneering work in the English provinces, as well as at the King's and the Duke of York's theatres in London.

During the war years we were together with Ballet Theatre in America and, afterward, on the extensive tours which Hurok arranged, with our own ensemble, presenting the classic and romantic sequences from many famous ballets as well as our own solos. Apart from one-night stands in the United States, we took our small ballet company by air all through Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean, and we flew across the Pacific to Honolulu and as far as Manila. We returned to Europe together after the war, in 1948, to face a new generation of balletomanes at Covent Garden, as guest artistes with the Sadler's Wells Ballet. We also paid our first visit to South Africa together. From September 1949 to the end of that year, together with a full corps de ballet and an orchestra under the direction of Leighton Lucas, we toured England and Scotland, giving five or six performances a week. Except for a few weeks, we appeared on a specially erected stage in the largest available hall.

I have spent more time with Alicia, both on and off the stage, than with any other artiste, and she can say the same of me. This might not have happened, had we remained in London all through the years.

As we appeared with Sadler's Wells Ballet in its infancy, it is conceivable that we might have stayed with them as permanent members of the company. In that case, I should have lived in my studio in Chelsea and Alicia would have lived

with her mother and sisters in their flat at Marble Arch, and we might not have seen so much of each other, apart from rehearsals, performances at the theater, and occasional social functions which we would naturally have attended together. By fate and circumstance sending us to the far corners of the earth, our careers flung us closer together, resulting in a companionship that might never have existed had we remained in London.

We have had our successes but we have shared trials and hours of illness and misfortune, when I learned more about Alicia than I could hope to have done in years of a purely professional relationship in the theater.

That is why I am so eager to write this book, because I *know* the real person behind the exotic, sometimes temperamental *prima ballerina assoluta*.

When people stop me at the stage door, or talk to me at parties, we very often discuss Alicia, and the inevitable question arises: "What is she *really* like?" They cannot begin to think for themselves how an ethereal Giselle or Swan Queen lives and behaves offstage.

I am hoping that my book will answer their query by letting them see the real human being behind this great artiste. I want to leave a few words behind which can be read long after we have taken our last curtain call.

Balletomanes yet unborn will hear of Markova, as we hear of Taglioni and Grisi. They may be able to gaze upon her fragile satin ballet shoes in some theatrical museum, and they will be able to admire countless photographs of her in all her famous roles. I want them to know more than that, something which no official records can possibly bring to light.


The public have long worshiped the ballerina who has so often given me a rose from her bouquet, but it has been our mutual devotion and Alicia's dedication to her art that have guided our relationship safely through many difficult times, producing an artistic and personal understanding rarely known between two dancers.

With the image of her birthplace still in my mind, and the echo of last night's applause still in my ears, I have set about connecting the two in what I hope will be a worthy tribute to the first English *ballerina assoluta* and my first choice for a permanent partner from all the great ballerinas with whom I have had the privilege and good fortune to dance.



## CHAPTER ONE

# CHILDHOOD



ALTHOUGH there is no trace of theatrical blood in Alicia Markova's ancestors, it is a fact that the London of 1910, the year of her birth, bristled with the comings and goings of Russian Ballet dancers. It seems as if the Fates excelled themselves in setting the stage and preparing for the entrance of this fragile ballerina-to-be, who arrived on the scene on that first day of December, a Thursday, when, a few hundred yards away, Marie Lloyd, darling of the London music halls, was singing "She's It" at the Finsbury Park Empire.

The music hall was not to be despised in that year, since it was the medium through which some of the most famous of Russian dancers made themselves known to the British public.

It was as part of a variety bill at the Palace, in April, that Pavlova and Mordkin first staggered London with what one

critic called their "pure melody of motion." They appeared on the same program with Albert Whelan, Arley's Athletic Dogs, and moving pictures of Teddy Roosevelt's British East Africa Big Game Shooting Expedition. But even in so incongruous a setting these two supreme artistes impressed the audience with their dramatic power as well as their dancing. While fascinated by the thistledown lightness and gracefulness of their movements, I feel sure the fashionable patrons of the Palace were able to read a whole world of emotion and imagination in the facial expression of these magical dancers from Imperial Russia.

The Palace was not the only music hall presenting ballet, which was enjoying something of a boom that year, for in May, at the time of Edward VII's death, the London Hippodrome staged a variety bill which included a full-length version of *Le Lac des Cygnes* with Preobrajenska and a company of dancers from the Imperial Ballets of St. Petersburg and Moscow, including Ludmilla Schollar and Georges Kyasht. For the price of admission, patrons could also enjoy the risqué songs of Yvette Guilbert, as well as Bioscope pictures of the lying in state of the late monarch.

It was also possible to see Karsavina and Alexis Kosloff dancing *Giselle* nightly at the Coliseum, while Lydia Kyasht, the first Russian ballerina to conquer London, two years before Pavlova, was drawing lovers of ballet to the Empire, where she was partnered by the great character dancer, Adolf Bolm.

So the stage had seen a full and glorious year of dancing by the time December dawned and Mrs. Marks presented her husband with a frail daughter and Terpsichore with a new

disciple who was to prove one of her most devoted worshippers.

It was a happy, comfortable, and prosperous home into which little Alicia was born.

Arthur Marks, the child's father, was a young man of the Jewish faith, who first met his future wife when he was a boy of thirteen, and little Eileen Barry, only a year younger, had come over from Ireland to stay with her stepfather in Haringay. Arthur Marks was particularly attracted by her pig-tails and always seemed to be hanging about the school gates waiting to escort young Miss Barry home. She did all she could to discourage his attentions. Undaunted, young Arthur made a friend of Miss Barry's young brother Willie, and frequently called at the house to see him, when he thought the sister would be at home.

It was a bunch of violets that changed both their lives. The little girl had been ill and was taking the air for the first time after getting out of bed. She was in particularly low spirits, feeling rather sorry for herself. At the end of the road she found Arthur Marks, who smiled at her and said, "I'm so glad to see you out again. I thought you'd like these." He pressed a small bunch of violets into her hand, and melted her heart at the same time. They became close friends and when she was sixteen they were engaged, although both families disapproved of the union because of their differences in faith.

Eileen, with the full face and smiling eyes of an Irish colleen, had been reared in County Cork, proud to count herself one of the Bloody Bourkes of Galway and to trace her descent from the kings and queens of Ireland.

In his late teens Arthur Marks went to America where he won early distinction in his profession as a mining engineer.

Both families hoped that the young people would change their minds about marriage during the period of their separation, but that old saying about absence making the heart grow fonder seemed to hold good where they were concerned. The girl who had been brought up in an Irish convent was quite prepared to learn Hebrew, take the Jewish name of Ruth, and marry Arthur Marks, which she did, four years after their engagement, at the Upper Berkeley Street Synagogue in London.

In 1910 the young couple went over to County Cork to visit Mrs. Marks' family in Crosshaven and to see the incredibly green Emerald Isle at its loveliest, its hedgerows bedecked with a profusion of blossoms.

Though she did not know it, Mrs. Marks was pregnant. It is just as well that she was unaware of the fact, or she might have been more than unduly alarmed when she was tossed by a frisky young bull as she crossed the field of a neighboring farm. She was still ignorant of her condition when she returned to London and went to the World's Fair which at that time was drawing thousands to the Earl's Court Exhibition. She was eager to enjoy the fun of the fair, but, following a ride on a roller coaster, she fainted in her husband's arms. A doctor was summoned, and when she recovered she knew that in less than six months she would have her first child.

At that time the mighty Assuan Dam was being constructed in Egypt and Arthur Marks was offered work out there which was too remunerative to be turned down by a young married man, especially one who would soon be a family man as well. Mrs. Marks accompanied her husband, feeling there was plenty of time before the child was born.

She returned to England for the birth of her baby. That both mother and child lived was something of a miracle. As doctor and nurse fought for the survival of at least one life, hardly daring to hope for both, Arthur Marks cried, "Let my child die, but save my wife! I can have another child . . . I do not want another wife!" Both survived.

As Alicia has said since, "I suppose even then I willed myself to live, to be of this world. I have willed and struggled ever since, just to go on and on—to exist. In the very beginning it was difficult. If it comes to that, it has always been so. I suppose it was meant to be, but the fight, thank God, has been worth while. I am quite sure of that now."

While Mrs. Marks was carrying her first child, she had already fallen under the spell of the ballet. She had been to the Empire to see Adeline Genée, that great ballerina, whose technique must have been nearer perfection than that of any other dancer in living memory. No wonder she used to peep at her with bated breath when she visited the house next door.

Soon after her marriage Mrs. Marks had witnessed those electrifying first performances of Pavlova in London and had seen her dancing Rubinstein's *Valse Caprice* with Mordkin, conveying all "the uncertain glory of an April day." They were rich, emotional, and artistic experiences which remained vividly alive in Mrs. Marks' memory as long as she lived.

While staying in Cairo, Mrs. Marks paid several visits to the Sphinx and was deeply impressed by its mysterious beauty. One night, while she and her husband were admiring the gigantic face by moonlight, they wondered how the mighty monument had been created, and fell to considering their own creation and whether it would be a boy or a girl.

Mrs. Marks said that she hoped it would be a girl and added that she would be more than satisfied if the child danced a quarter as well as Pavlova. Her husband said that he would be very happy to have a daughter, but hoped that she might possess just a suggestion of the eternal mystery of the Sphinx.

When, at the age of ten, Alicia made her first professional appearance, she performed an oriental dance, and there is still something indefinably mysterious about her face. Also in some miraculous manner the spirit of Anna Pavlova seems to have entered Alicia Markova. Now, as a fully-matured artiste, I feel Markova is the nearest approach to the divine Pavlova that this or any other age will give us. Each time I see her dance, or when I watch her at rehearsal, or dance on the stage with her, I am more and more conscious of this extraordinary physical resemblance which, at times, is almost uncanny.

In time the Marks family was to be completed by the addition of three sisters. Doris arrived four years after Alicia, Vivienne three years later, and, finally, Berenice, nicknamed Bunny, who is eight years younger than Alicia.

The first born was named Alicia after her great-grandmother. There was never any suggestion of her being called Alice. Ballet enthusiasts, proud of the fact that the internationally famous Markova is of British origin, are constantly saying that originally she was Alice Marks. Nothing infuriates her more, as she happens to hate the name of Alice. Her birth certificate plainly proclaims her name to be Alicia. Another member of the family, apart from her great-grandmother, also bore the name. Her other name of Lilian has family associations as well.

It was a strange family into which this child of the ballet

was born. It was composed of inventors and engineers. Her great-uncle, Sir Albert Altman, designed the drawbridge mechanism on the Tower Bridge, one of the wonders of the Victorian Age, for which services he was knighted by the Queen. Alicia's grandfather, Herbert Marks, specialized in lighting and was a pioneer in the illumination of theater exteriors. He made Drury Lane more conspicuous after dark, and then went to America, where his new ideas did much toward transforming Broadway into the Great White Way.

Alicia saw little of their grandfather because of his travels and long residence in South Africa, so she and her sisters looked upon their great-grandfather, Abraham Marks, more as a grandparent. He and his business had a fascination for the Marks girls. Abraham was a great friend of Willie Clarkson, the famous theatrical costumier, who used to supply Bernhardt, as well as many other celebrated artistes, not only with their costumes but their many changes of headdresses and wigs. In Islington, Abraham used to supply trimmings to theatrical costumiers, which made his business premises at the back of the house something of an Aladdin's Cave to the little girls.

On Saturday afternoons the children were generally taken out by their nurse, a young Irishwoman named Gladys Hogan, who became one of the family at the time Doris was born, and remained with them for years. They would invariably persuade her to take them to Islington to see Grandpa Abraham. He was always glad to see them, as his wife had died some years previously and he often felt lonely with no one but a housekeeper for company.

The nurse, who was always known as "Guggy," used to en-

joy a friendly chat in the kitchen with the housekeeper, while the girls had tea upstairs with the old man. They did not waste much time over tea, though they enjoyed the toasted buns and iced cakes which were piled up on silver stands. They wanted to get into the workrooms. After all, they could have cakes at home, but nowhere else could they see such wonders as those which were stacked up in Grandpa's workrooms.

Saturday afternoon was a good time to pay a visit, when the staff had gone home and the children were free to explore the treasures. Nothing in any draper's window compared with the glory of the lovely things in Grandpa's establishment. His merchandise, designed for the theater, had a glitter which was absent from the finery displayed in ordinary shops.

The girls used to gloat over cards of jeweled buttons, lengths of trimmings encrusted with diamanté, and gold tassels rich enough to adorn a queen's coronation robe. Grandpa would give them snippings of the most gorgeous brocades and velvets for their dolls' clothes, as well as sequins and spangles which made each of their dolls look like a princess.

Alicia took great pleasure in matching up the various materials and accessories for her dolls. Their dresses never looked as if they had been made from a hotchpotch of materials salvaged from the ragbag. Her color sense was good, and she invariably set off each dress with a touch of contrasting material which gave her dolls a most distinctive air.

Alicia is always tastefully dressed, and that is true of her even in the difficult years, when she never spent a shilling on anything except the absolute necessities of life. No matter how meager a sum she allowed herself for clothes, she always



managed to acquire the right dress, hat, shoes, bag, and gloves which created an effect of quiet good taste.

As the girls grew older, they began to think about making costumes for themselves rather than for their dolls. Alicia was quick to make the most of all the lovely loot they could acquire from Islington and soon devised effective costumes for her younger sisters. Grandpa's trimmings were meant to be worn by real actresses, singing and dancing on the stage, so the girls hit upon the idea of having their own children's theater at home, with Alicia as producer, designer, program printer, and principal performer. She took complete charge, but the others did what they were told quite willingly, as Alicia always appeared to be right, whether she was matching materials for a dress or teaching them new steps to the strains of a gramophone record.

Then the Sphinx began to raise her mysterious head for the first time. Among the gramophone records which the girls used for their theatrical performances was one of Luigini's *Ballet Egyptien*. It had a curious fascination for Alicia. She played it over and over again, seeking her first choreographic inspiration. When she finally worked out the ballet, she sprang a surprise on the family by having young Bunny carried in on a cushion, sitting cross-legged like an infant Scheherazade.

Alicia printed all the programs by hand for these occasions, which were usually attended by members of the family and one or two neighbors. For the première of her *Ballet Egyptien* she decorated the front of the program with a rough sketch of the Sphinx of Gizeh, drawn from a colored plate in a geography book. She herself danced in bare feet, as she did when

she first appeared in public in a pupil's display. Later, in pantomime, she also danced in bare feet, as she did in the first ballet created for her at Sadler's Wells, when she appeared as Echo to the Narcissus of Stanley Judson in the Ninette de Valois version of *Narcissus and Echo*, with music by Arthur Bliss.

Mr. Marks was so impressed by the industry and talent of his daughters that he built a concrete stage for them in the garden of their North London home, and there, under a canvas awning, they amused themselves and their friends for hours. They did all the work themselves, their father helping them by working the gramophone behind the scenes.

Music was always the strong feature of these entertainments. Alicia had enough theater sense, even at that age, to realize that grownups soon wearied of children reciting their party pieces, so she introduced music into the program on every possible occasion. She herself had been a music lover from the age of two. Their house in those days was situated between Finsbury Park and Clissold Park, so little Alicia used to spend a good deal of time in each park.

Her destination was chosen according to her mood. If she wanted to listen to the band, she was taken to Finsbury Park; but if she wanted to feed the swans, she went to Clissold Park. Usually she chose the band, much to the amusement of other strollers in the park, who smiled at the sight of this tiny child, looking so old for her years, as, carried away by the strains of the *Blue Danube Waltz*, she conducted with a pencil.

Alicia's love of music has increased with the years, so whenever she has a free evening, her first move is to discover if there is a concert worth attending. She likes what she calls

meaty music, such as Wagner or Richard Strauss, but really prefers the concert hall to the opera house, so that she can give herself entirely to the music and not have to divide her attention between the aural and visual side of the entertainment. Music means so much to her, and she has such respect for the works of the various composers and the way they intended to have them played, that she is more distressed than any dancer I know when a musical director takes liberties with classical scores such as *Les Sylphides* or Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony*.

I wonder if her first sight of swans gliding on the lake in Clissold Park had any effect in later years upon her performance of *The Dying Swan*. She still has vivid memories of feeding them and remembers how she could distinguish one from another, so perhaps her keen sense of observation and her retentive memory stored up an inspiring vision of this most graceful of all birds, accounting to some extent for the poignant fluttering of her sensitive fingers in that unforgettable dance.

Dress caused Alicia considerable disappointment and dissatisfaction in her childhood. She had her own way when it came to dressing her dolls and when she dressed her sisters for their theatrical performances, but she disliked the way her mother dressed her. She wanted something rather soft and feminine, but Mrs. Marks thought her eldest daughter "looked French" with her black fringe, and, in consequence, she liked to see her turned out in sailor suits, with H.M.S. embroidered on the cap in gold. Even on Sundays she had to follow the same rather severe style with a white reefer coat and a Panama hat.

The child liked the ankle-strap shoes and sandals worn by other girls, but because she suffered from weak ankles, she was condemned to wear either button or laced-up boots. She used to curse her boots, especially at parties, when she had to change them for dancing or games. Poor Alicia was still undoing her laces long after the other girls had changed and were assembled in readiness for the fun.

Even in the question of stage costumes, she failed to get her own way on the occasion of her first appearance at a pupils' display. She longed to dance in a billowing cloud of tulle like the pictures she had seen of Adeline Genée and Anna Pavlova in her mother's album, but looking so serious and mature for her years, with a very definite profile, she was cast as an oriental siren and given gold-tissue trousers to wear. They were exotic enough, but they displeased her intensely because she felt she could express herself so much more freely in tulle than in tissue.

Alicia was dancing a good deal about the time of her eighth birthday. Both she and her sisters thought it a waste of time to play the conventional games popular with other children. They were not happy unless they were acting, singing, or dancing in connection with their own entertainments at home. When inventing new steps to the music of the gramophone, Alicia noticed that her left knee was liable to give way occasionally. She told her mother, who promptly took her to a specialist. He examined the child, looking both through and over his spectacles, and told Mrs. Marks that her daughter was knock-kneed and flat-footed.

Secretly, Mrs. Marks felt rather angry about the remarks, which she considered an insult. He even went on to talk about

the child wearing braces for a few months as a means of correction. That was the last straw! On further reflection, he suggested that Alicia might take up some "fancy dancing" as a means of strengthening her limbs, which seemed almost too slender to carry even her frail little body. Anything rather than braces! So Mrs. Marks paid her fee and decided to arrange for Alicia to go to an academy of dancing. It was worth taking a chance, and in any case no harm could be done by improving a young girl's deportment.

The Misses Thorne—Madge and Dorothy—had quite a reputation in London at that time as teachers of dancing and elocution. Madge taught elocution, while Dorothy looked after the ballet. As there was a branch of their academy in Palmer's Green, Mrs. Marks thought it would be a good idea if Guggy took Alicia there on Saturday mornings for some dancing lessons. As little Doris fancied herself as a budding actress, even at the age of four, she was sent as well, to receive instruction in elocution. The girls seemed very happy to go off to their classes every week, and, as far as Alicia's knee was concerned, it began to look as if the specialist had prescribed the right course, as it became considerably stronger and no longer let her down.

Apart from that, Mrs. Marks did not pay much attention to what was happening at Miss Thorne's Academy.

Miss Thorne, on the other hand, became slowly aware of having a miracle child in her dancing class. The child had an elfin grace, picked up new steps in the twinkling of an eye, and executed them with the ease of a professional artiste. It was uncanny in one so young. Miss Thorne asked Guggy to tell Mrs. Marks how impressed she was with her daughter's

talent, feeling that something ought to be done about it. Mrs. Marks did not pay much attention to Guggy's remarks, feeling that it was probably a cunning move on Miss Thorne's part to get her to spend more money on extra lessons for Alicia.

Nothing was done. Still the child continued to amaze Miss Thorne by the effortless ease with which she performed the most intricate combinations of steps. Surely her family would do something about it if they knew. So Miss Dorothy called on Mrs. Marks to insist upon her presence at the Academy. The mother accompanied the girls on the following Saturday and was astonished at the way Alicia had progressed under expert tuition. She agreed that something ought to be done about the child, but what? She was far too young to put on the stage, so matters were left in abeyance for the time being, although Alicia still continued to take her weekly lesson.

An open talent competition supplied the next surprise for the Marks family. It was held at the Athenaeum in Muswell Hill, the North London suburb in which they were living at the time. The management, as an additional attraction to their film program, held a talent-spotting competition. The winner received a check for five guineas as well as a contract for a week's engagement. The public judged the best act for themselves, the criterion being the volume and duration of the applause.

There were no two opinions in the house when they saw Alicia dance. The child was deafened by a storm of excited applause. It was her first taste of public adulation, and she honestly confesses that she rather liked it, though she was a bit disappointed at having to go home without her contract. She received the five guineas, but being too young to appear on the professional stage, she had to forfeit that part of the

glory. Having been baptized, so far as applause was concerned, she gained a new confidence and was anxious to evoke similar thunder as soon and as often as possible.

The next occasion occurred at St. John's Hall, Palmer's Green, when the Thorne Academy pupils gave their annual performance. Alicia was taught a cymbal dance for the occasion and was dressed as a sultana from *The Arabian Nights*. This strange child with burning eyes in a singularly old and mature face which compelled one to look, and look again, wore a dress of apricot chiffon with short Turkish bloomers, a gold belt, and jeweled breastplates. On her black hair she balanced an elaborate headdress of pearls, complete with chin strap. To complete the effect, she carried small gold cymbals. It was a costume such as Theda Bara might have worn at the height of her vampire glory, but it must have looked strangely out of place on a child of eight, with no glamour in the accepted sense of the word.

Nevertheless, Alicia conquered another audience, and this time she won her first press notice. It was only eleven words in length, but every artiste has to start some time, and not many get notices at eight years of age. The critic of *The Sentinel* wrote on February 21, 1919 that "Little Lily Marks made a great hit with an Eastern dance." She appears to have made a great hit with the critic as well. He felt that she was someone to keep in mind, for a year later, when Miss Thorne's pupils gave another performance at the same hall in Palmer's Green, *The Sentinel* wrote, "We always watch for Lily Marks, and this time, again, she did not disappoint us. There was something daintily suggestive in her Rose Poem dance to music by Chopin."

Already she was winning a public of her own and making a

lasting impression on those who saw her. When Alicia was nine, she made her first appearance in the West End with the pupils of the Thorne Academy at King's Hall, Covent Garden, only a stone's throw from the Royal Opera House which was to be the scene of many a later triumph. With uncanny assurance the child was getting a remarkable hold on audiences, being greeted by rounds of applause and recalled over and over again. She put an astonishing amount of character into her now famous Eastern dance which, according to the *Dancing Times*, "supplied the best individual dance of the afternoon."

After her first taste of a West End triumph, Alicia was taken to tea at Fuller's, where she was envied and admired by some of the less talented pupils who were being entertained at neighboring tables by adoring mothers and aunts.

It is perhaps not quite correct to say that Alicia's appearance at King's Hall was her West End debut, but it was the first time she had been noticed by the press in the West End. However, a year earlier she had given her services at a matinee held at the Strand Theatre on April 1, 1919, in aid of the Italian Red Cross, during World War I.

The program opened with the band of the Grenadier Guards playing Verdi's Overture to *Giovanna d'Arco*, and this was immediately followed, according to the program, by Miss Lily Marks—Danseuse. It was probably a shock for the audience to see a dancer of such tiny stature, but they gave her a very good reception before settling down to enjoy the rest of the bill, which included such familiar and popular names as José Collins, Margaret Bannerman, Jack Buchanan, Fay Compton and Beatrice Lillie.



Mr. Marks was rather proud of his talented daughters, for Doris was making good headway in the elocution class at Miss Thorne's and was given every encouragement by her father, who still had eyes for the other girls, despite Alicia's dazzling achievements. It pleased him to hear them reciting pieces they had learned by heart, so, if they were good, particularly on Sunday mornings, when he had more time to spare, he would coach them in new verses from their repertoire. Doris made rather a hit with *Gunga Din*. At Miss Thorne's, she and Alicia had studied a recitation for two entitled *Contradictions*, and this, together with the Puck and Titania scenes from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, was regarded as the high spot at family gatherings and parties when the children were called upon to entertain their elders.

As they were crazy about acting and had little time for the childish pastimes of girls of their own age, it was considered that no harm could come from allowing them to go to an occasional theater or cinema.

Doris had been doing some child acting for the screen and had recently appeared in a film version of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, in which Mabel Poulton played Little Nell. Mr. Marks suggested that Alicia and Doris should go and see the film at the local cinema, not realizing the effect it would have upon his highly impressionable elder daughter. When Quilp came on the screen, Alicia was simply terrified, and clenched her little hands until they turned white with tension. She had never seen so horrible a creature and felt that with men like that lurking about, the world was a rather terrible place in which to live.

She looked at Doris out of the corner of her eye, but gained

little comfort, as Doris had met all the actors and actresses in the film and thought them very nice people, particularly Quilp, who had taken quite a fancy to her and bought her chocolate and cakes at the film studio canteen. She was beaming with pleasure as all her old friends came on the screen. Alicia screwed up sufficient courage to sit through the film, but when Quilp came on, she tried to avoid looking at him by concentrating her attention on the illuminated clock at the side of the screen.

She seemed strangely silent as they walked home, but Doris hardly noticed it, as she was chattering away about the artistes who had made such a fuss of her at the studio. It was late when they reached home, so Mrs. Marks hurriedly prepared supper and told them to get off to bed. Alicia refused to eat a thing. She was thinking about Quilp and wondering how long he would continue to haunt her. Silently she went upstairs with Doris to the bedroom which they shared. She crossed over to the window to draw the curtains. As she looked out, she uttered a piercing shriek, and fell back on the floor in a dead faint. Doris was terrified and ran downstairs, yelling for help.

When Alicia came to she explained that she thought she saw Quilp outside the window and imagined he had come to fetch her. It was more than the imaginative child could bear, and she lost consciousness.

Alicia was so sensitive and so vividly moved by the things she saw and read that great care had to be taken in choosing her reading matter and her entertainment. Even *The Water Babies* frightened her when she first read it. Thinking music might be safer, her mother encouraged her to devote more

time to the piano, which she played very well. She admired Doris's talent for putting over a song, but, soon after joining the vocal class at Miss Thorne's, she was dismissed for singing out of tune.

*Chu Chin Chow*, the spectacular musical play which ran at His Majesty's Theatre for 2,238 performances during World War I, was considered suitable entertainment for Alicia, possibly because of the music and partly because of the oriental setting which her mother thought might appeal to the little Sphinx-like cymbal dancer.

The outing was a huge success, and she took great joy in restaging the dances when she returned home. Doris, who had been very unhappy about not being taken, was swept away by Alicia's enthusiasm and was soon poring over a copy of *The Arabian Nights*, with a view to making some new costumes to suit the Eastern music.

Mrs. Marks was delighted to observe that *Chu Chin Chow* had been more successful than *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and she also noted that the dances in the show made a stronger impression upon Alicia than any other part of it. Why not take the child to see some ballet the next time she took her out?

Pavlova still remained the most cherished of all Mrs. Marks's theatrical impressions, and she was anxious for her daughter to share them. She had already tried twice to make Alicia Pavlova-conscious, but possibly the child was too young to appreciate the great dancer, as she had not appeared unduly enthusiastic. The first time, when Alicia was only six, her mother took her to see a film made by Pavlova. All Alicia can recall was a graceful figure dancing through whirl-

ing smoke. It was very beautiful and she talked about it a good deal afterward, but it gave her no burning desire to become a great dancer.

Much later Mrs. Marks took Alicia to the theater to see Pavlova in the thrilling *Autumn Bacchanale* in which, as a bacchante, she danced across the stage in a frenzy of abandoned joy. The child was excited, but that was all. Her mother felt that the time had come for Alicia to see great dancing, so she knew it was time to show her Pavlova again. She had obviously not missed a step of the dances at His Majesty's, and if such mediocre choreography could make so deep an impression upon her, what effect would Pavlova have at this stage in her artistic development?

Very soon thereafter Pavlova gave an evening of popular *divertissement* at the Queen's Hall. Alicia and her father went on a warm summer evening to see the greatest dancer within living memory and, possibly, the greatest dancer of all time.

Though Alicia was silent on the way to Queen's Hall, she hoped that her father had taken seats in the circle. She knew from previous visits to theaters that she was usually the smallest member of the audience, and when she happened to sit in the stalls behind a tall man, she found it rather trying to see what was happening on the stage. However, Mrs. Marks had taken care of the arrangements for this evening, and remembering how much more she enjoyed ballet from the circle at the Empire and the Palace, she suggested that Alicia should sit upstairs.

Once installed, the child was more than pleased with the

clear and unobstructed view of the stage. Her father had bought her a souvenir program containing pictures of the great ballerina in all types of exotic costumes and graceful poses, as well as a smiling photograph taken with a swan, in the garden of Ivy House at Golders Green, which had become her permanent home.

To the *Glow Worm* music of Hermann Finck, Alicia watched the popular *Gavotte Pavlova*, in which Pavlova wore a yellow satin dress with a train looped to her wrist. The yellow was more radiant than anything she had ever seen in Grandpa's workroom. The dancer wore it with all the elegance of one of the great ladies in the storybooks. She looked a *grande dame*, and how gracefully she moved! How clumsy Miss Thorne's best pupils seemed in comparison! One step seemed to melt into the next, producing a continuous fluid movement, just as individual notes of music harmonize to create an immortal melody. Dancing appeared to be her natural mode of expression. Never for an instant did it seem to be something she had learned in a classroom with a tinkling piano and a ballet mistress beating time on the floor with a stick.

As Pavlova dissolved from sight, Alicia sat transfixed in her seat. Her father knew exactly how she felt and merely exchanged an affectionate glance with her. Her enormous eyes still focused on the stage, anxious not to miss a step of the next number. Later, just before the interval, Pavlova danced *Californian Poppy* to one of Tchaikovsky's loveliest melodies. Alicia, who is passionately fond of flowers, was fascinated by this dance in which the poppy opened out in the warmth of the sunshine and then closed up as the cool of the evening

approached. The child caught her breath as the dancer drew the scarlet petals of her dress upward over her face with a curious shuddering movement. She felt that Pavlova must be a great lover of flowers or she could never have danced with such expression and understanding.

Alicia used to feel sorry for the flowers in their own garden, as they shut themselves up for the night, trying to keep as warm as possible until the sun rose again in the morning. Pavlova must have felt like that. Perhaps she had flowers as well as swans in the garden of Ivy House, and perhaps she went out to see them at dusk to make sure they were in no danger from wicked insects or destructive animals. Even the most lovable of domestic pets can play havoc in a flowerbed, but Alicia was sure that Pavlova had a way with animals. One had only to look at that picture with the swan. Alicia had never seen anyone photographed with a swan before, but the swan seemed to enjoy posing for the picture and being fondled by Pavlova.

The house lights went up and the audience broke into a flood of excited chatter. Alicia was still tightly holding her illustrated program when her father leaned over to her. "It's very hot, darling. Would you like some ice cream?"

"No, thank you, Daddy," she replied. "But do you think I could see Madame Pavlova afterward?"

Her father was astounded by the suddenness and the nature of the request. One heard of dancers casting a spell over people, but no one who knew Alicia could have imagined her asking to meet the great Pavlova. Mr. Marks felt that soon he would not know his own daughter; Alicia, who was so shy that she never spoke to strangers or newcomers unless they

first addressed her, and after answering politely in as few words as possible, would lapse into her former silence. She made scarcely any friends. Mr. Marks was entirely baffled by her eagerness to meet a stranger—and a grownup at that.

"Madame Pavlova would not know us, dear, even if we went to see her," ventured Mr. Marks. "What makes you think you would like to meet her?"

On Alicia's lap the souvenir program lay open at the page featuring the picture of the ballerina with her favorite swan.

"I'd like to see her, Daddy, because she is kind. She loves animals and flowers. Please, please, Daddy, go out and see if we can meet her afterward. I'll be all right. I'll stay here in my seat and look at these pictures. I promise not to move. Do go, Daddy!"

The bewildered Mr. Marks made his way to the entrance hall, wondering what to do. The child was set on meeting Pavlova and would obviously not take no for an answer. He was anxious to do his best for his daughter, but, having no experience of backstage manners and customs, he had no idea how people were received by theatrical celebrities. However, he went round to the stage door and saw a commissioner, asking if he might send in his card to see Madame after the performance.

"She never sees any ov 'um after the show," the man answered. "You see gents in topers with bunches of roses in their 'ands, and ladies wearin' enough diamonds to blind yer, but Madame don't see any ov 'um. She's 'ad by the end of the evenin' and just goes 'ome with 'er old man."

Being a friendly stage-door keeper, he went on to explain that Madame's "old man" was M. Victor Dandr , who was

probably in the foyer. Nothing could be done except through him, so he suggested that Mr. Marks go around and have a word with him. The man at the door would point him out, since being Madame's business manager, he was well known both back and front of the house.

Mr. Marks hurried round to the main entrance and had M. Dandr  pointed out to him. He looked to be quite human, so he walked up and addressed him without any hesitation.

"Forgive my intrusion," he began, "but I have brought my daughter to see Madame Pavlova dance this evening, and I wonder if Madame would be good enough to see her for a moment afterward."

"Who is your daughter?" asked M. Dandr  simply.

Not daring to say that she was a mere child of eight, Mr. Marks replied, "She is a young dancer who has already attracted the attention of the critics, and she would be so grateful if Madame could spare her just a moment."

M. Dandr  explained that Madame never received guests backstage after the performance and hoped that Mr. Mark's daughter would understand that the iron rule was never broken, even for grand duchesses. Seeing the look of bitter disappointment on the father's face, M. Dandr  said that as Miss Marks was a dancer and had already been singled out by the critics, he felt that Madame would be happy to see her dance, if she cared to present herself at Ivy House the next morning at eleven-thirty.

Fearing M. Dandr  might change his mind, Mr. Marks thanked him sincerely and hastily returned to his seat. Alicia was overjoyed at the amazing news.

*Christmas* was the great moment for Alicia, when Pavlova,



in an eighteenth-century costume danced, to a Tchaikovsky waltz, *The Belle of the Ball*, surrounded by all the beaux of the evening. She looked so young and lovely, just how Alicia hoped she might look when she grew up. No wonder all those handsome young men crowded around to pay her pretty compliments!

As Alicia moved into the aisle after the performance, she felt a little dizzy with excitement, what with the dancing and the prospect of tomorrow.

"Daddy," she entreated, "could we go to the stage door and see Madame going home? It would be wonderful just to look at her!" Alicia always asked so quietly and so appealingly that he could never refuse any request she made. So they waited near the stage door for the better part of an hour.

The child held her breath when the great dancer emerged from the stage door and swept gracefully into her waiting car. She felt a sense of contact, perhaps unconsciously realizing that she had something in common with that famous ballerina and feeling a great sense of pride because she would meet her and dance for her before another twelve hours had passed.

It was Pavlova's hat that took Alicia's eye. It was so remarkable a creation that it still remains one of the most vivid memories of her childhood. In size it was enormous, in color it was black, and in style it was quite novel. A long black fringe hung from the underside of the brim, looking like gorgeous blue-black tresses.

Because Pavlova's *Dying Swan* was the rage at that time, and to the end of her career, it seems strange that she did not dance it on the occasion when Alicia saw her at the Queen's Hall. It is even worth noting now that Markova has made

such a profound impression in the same dance, that she never saw Pavlova or any other ballerina dance it.

After that memorable visit to Queen's Hall, she saw Pavlova dance on only two other occasions.

"I was taken to Covent Garden to see her dance in *Giselle*," Alicia recalls. "I was quite young at the time, and I have to confess that the first act is a complete blank to me, but I was deeply moved by the second act. The story took hold of me, and I was moved by the sight of the Celtic cross in the forest. I remember Pavlova dancing in pale-green shroudlike draperies and not the traditional white ballet skirt favored by other dancers who have appeared as *Giselle* since Carlotta Grisi created it in the 1840s. I did not see the ballet again until Olga Spessiva and you danced it in London in 1933, the year before I first appeared in the role.

"The only other occasion on which I saw Pavlova dance was in *Don Quixote* with Laurent Novikoff. Once more the first act has faded out of my memory, but I shall never forget her second-act entrance. Pavlova was an exquisite vision in a silver dress and she traversed the stage in a series of dazzling *pas de bourrées* which made me, child though I was, slightly faint with excitement. I know that I can never hope to see their like again."

Mrs. Marks expected her daughter to return at a loss for words, as she herself had been after seeing Pavlova and Mordkin at the Palace. She was certainly not prepared for Alicia to burst in with the news, "I'm going to dance for Pavlova in the morning!" It was the mother's turn to be at a loss for words.

After the exciting events of the evening had been recounted, Mrs. Marks began to think about the next day. Was

Alicia's practice costume all right? Had she a new pair of ballet slippers? Which hat and coat did she intend to wear? Nothing so momentous had happened to the family before, so they all went to bed in a flutter of excitement not exactly conducive to a good night's sleep.

The house was awake earlier than usual next morning. During breakfast, Mrs. Marks asked, "Have you got your comb?" and "Have you got a spare handkerchief?" When everything appeared to be fully organized, father and daughter left to call on the great Pavlova.

It is such a vivid page in Alicia's past that I never tire of hearing her own account of it.

"Clutching a little case containing my practice clothes, we went up to the impressive door of Ivy House. Daddy rang the bell and we were shown into the hall which was cluttered with theatrical baskets, all bearing the initials A.P. Madame was just about to embark upon another foreign tour, and the company's wardrobe was obviously being checked and repaired under her personal supervision at home.

"In a few moments Madame appeared, dressed in simple mauve draperies, looking very beautiful in her rather severe Russian way. I had always liked mauve, and after that day it became my favorite color, and for a long time I wanted everything to be mauve. I planted mauve flowers in the garden, so that I could cut them for my bedroom, where I persuaded Mother to give me mauve curtains to match my dressing gown. It became quite a craze with me as a result of discovering Pavlova wore the shade.

"Looking back on the visit to Pavlova's house I cannot imagine why I did not die of fright when the servant opened

the front door. I used to be so scared of people at that age that I would do anything rather than meet strangers. Yet Pavlova did not seem to be a stranger. I felt that she had known me all my life and that we both knew all about each other. I was completely at home with her, and though I was so young I felt that we both spoke the same language and I could address her as an equal, quite fearlessly and without a trace of nervousness or self-consciousness. Later, at the age of fourteen, I felt much the same way about Diaghileff. It seems strange that I, a hypersensitive child should have no qualms about conversing with Pavlova and Diaghileff, the two most awe-inspiring and respected figures in the ballet world of their time. Even in my adult years I cannot recall meeting anyone else who put me so delightfully at ease as these two great Russian personalities.

"I had expected to dance for Pavlova at Ivy House, but she made it quite clear that she simply wanted to see me at the *barre*. She took Daddy into a sitting room and left him with a daily newspaper and some magazines and then conducted me to a spacious studio, where I changed into practice clothes in a little dressing room. When I was ready, Madame put me through some barre exercises, giving me valuable hints from time to time as she corrected me.

" 'Your work is good,' she commented, 'and one day you should make a fine dancer. You must realize that your life will be all work, lots and lots of hard work, and unless you are prepared to face that and give up your pleasures in order to be a dancer, it is better that you decide now to do something else. You must not be misled when you go to the theater and see a ballerina cheered as she takes her call with her arms

full of roses. That is just a fleeting moment of compensation in a life that is nothing but continuous work until the day you decide to retire. Think it well over before you make up your mind to dance for your living. Now go and change at once, or you will catch cold.'

"I retired to the little dressing room. Before I had a chance to get back into my street clothes Madame put her head round the door. She took stock of the things I had brought.

" 'Where is your towel?' she asked.

"I confessed that I had not brought one.

" 'Where is your eau de cologne?'

"I replied innocently that I had had a bath only that morning.

" 'But you must be rubbed down,' she protested. 'Stay there until I come back.'

"She returned in a few moments with a Turkish towel and a silver flask bearing the initials A.P. and containing the most refreshing eau de cologne imaginable. She explained to me that I must have a thorough rubdown whenever I attended a class or gave a performance, otherwise I might take cold and that might quite easily finish my career. She showed me how to do it by rubbing me down herself with all the care she would have taken over her own child.

" 'You must take good care of yourself,' she insisted. 'Everything depends upon your health if you are going to be a good dancer.'

"While she was talking I was admiring the exquisitely engraved silver flask. How I would love to have it for my own eau de cologne which I intended to purchase on the way home. For one brief moment I even considered stealing Ma-

dame's flask by slipping it into my case with my ballet slippers. I was afraid no one would believe that I had been to Ivy House and that the world's greatest dancer had seen my work and rubbed me down with her own beautiful hands. If I took her flask I could show it to people as proof that my story was true. On the other hand, it would also prove to them that I was a thief. I thought better of it, and resisted the temptation.

"I felt very happy as I left Ivy House, now that I had been close to my heroine and discovered what she wore, how she spoke, and where she lived. On the way home I asked Daddy to wait while I looked in a chemist's shopwindow. On a glass shelf I saw some wicker-covered flasks of eau de cologne, each bearing a ribbon bow of a different color. 'Daddy,' I asked, 'do you think that I could have one of those bottles of eau de cologne? I'd rather like that one with the mauve bow.'

"That was my one and only meeting with Pavlova. Later, when I decided quite definitely to take up ballet as a career and was studying under Seraphine Astafieva, Pavlova looked in during a class one morning. She recognized me, laughingly referred to me as 'the little one,' and said that she was glad to see that I was working so hard.

"The last time I saw her I was sitting in a box at a Paris theater, watching the Diaghileff Ballet, of which I had then become a minor member. I had no solo work that evening, so I have no idea whether she even saw me, but I remember being told that she hated the two modern ballets which were performed—*Pas d'Acier* and *Pastorale*.

"When Diaghileff died in 1929 and ballet suffered a major collapse, Pavlova offered to take some of his dancers, including me, into her own company. Doubrovskaya, Woizikovsky,

and Jazvinsky accepted her invitation. Much as I appreciated her kind gesture, it would have meant joining her corps de ballet. The idea did not attract me, after the four strenuous years I had spent working up from the bottom of the ladder with the Diaghileff Ballet, so I declined. Perhaps it is just as well, as Pavlova herself died a little more than a year later, and the ballet collapsed again."

Alicia's desire to possess a Pavlova souvenir was subsequently satisfied. She did not come into possession of the silver flask, but Madame Manyà, who was Pavlova's dresser for many years and a genius in the difficult art of making ballet costumes, made many a *tutu* for Alicia during those early days of the Sadler's Wells Ballet, and she gave her some large brilliants which Pavlova had worn on the stage.

When Alicia danced the full-length version of *Le Lac des Cygnes* in 1934 at Sadler's Wells, Pavlova's brilliants adorned the crown she wore as the Swan Queen. Manyà also gave her the woolen tights and sweater which Pavlova wore on the last occasion she worked with the company before her death, as well as the paper marguerite she tore on the last occasion she danced *Giselle* at Covent Garden. M. Dandré presented Alicia with a dark amber necklace which Pavlova often wore off stage, explaining that it was not a valuable piece of jewelry, but the one his wife liked best.

Later, Alicia acquired two prints, which used to hang in the great dancer's bedroom at Ivy House. They depict Amalia Ferraris in *Les Elfes* and Emma Livry in *Le Papillon*, and have been added to the collection of Taglioni lithographs in the sitting room in her sister's flat where she stays while in London.





## CHAPTER TWO

# PANTOMIME



ALICIA's schooling presented something of a problem. At a very early age she could walk but for long showed no sign of being able to talk. Her parents were worried when they heard children younger than their little girl saying, "Mama," "Dada," "Baba," and the usual simple words expected of them. Fearing something might be wrong, they had Alicia examined, only to be reassured that there was no cause for alarm. From tests carried out by a child psychologist, it was obvious that the baby had a highly active brain for her age and understood all that was going on around her, but patience needed to be exercised about her speech. It was emphasized that it would be a mistake to try to force her to talk, and the parents were advised to keep the child away from school and let her learn naturally from observation at home.

She was eight years old before she went to her first kinder-

garten, but by that time she was away ahead of the children she met there. Since the birth of Doris, four years previously, Guggy had been Alicia's governess, and under her instruction she had made rapid progress, particularly in history. She enjoyed reading about the great kings and queens, and was delighted when she discovered that such people existed in real life as well as in storybooks.

She did not care a great deal for school, which was not nearly so interesting as the individual instruction she received from Guggy by the cozy fireside. The others, always looking forward to playtime, called Alicia "goody-goody" because she preferred to stay in the classroom reading about Mary, Queen of Scots, or Joan of Arc, in her precious history book.

The past seemed to live for her so vividly that she found it quite easy to remember dates, a fact that used to infuriate the other children, who were not gifted with that photographic memory which Alicia appeared to have inherited from her father. But they had their revenge in the arithmetic lesson, which Alicia loathed; they would sing out the answers to sums while she was still wondering whether to subtract or divide.

The schooldays soon came to an end, as it took Alicia only a fortnight to develop an attack of whooping cough. Getting rid of it was a long job in those days, and her three sisters had to be kept in quarantine. Months passed by, as each child contracted the sickness in turn.

When the house had been given a clean bill of health once again, Alicia was sent to a new school.

She liked it no better than the kindergarten and was still convinced that Guggy could teach her more than all the real

schoolmistresses put together. Measles proved her salvation at the second school, and there was another long period at home while Doris, Vivienne, and Bunny all had their turn.

When Alicia was ten years old she was offered her first professional engagement.

In those days the Kennington Theatre in South London was one of the most beautiful suburban playhouses. It was built on land originally owned by King Edward VII, and Irving performed the impressive opening ceremony in 1898. The foyers were as spacious and ornate as the auditorium, which seated 1,500 people. At each end of the marble vestibule were two enormous carved oak fireplaces, and the management would point out proudly that each grate held one hundredweight of coal, and that fires burned throughout every performance during the winter months.

Lloyd George was a regular patron of the theater, and in the intervals could often be seen basking in the warmth of the glowing coals.

The theater feared no competition from the West End, for scarcely an artiste of distinction failed to appear in Kennington. Martin Harvey received the notification of his knighthood while playing there, and many outstanding artistes—Mrs. Patrick Campbell, Lily Langtry, Mrs. Kendal, Sir Gerald du Maurier, Granville-Barker, Kate Rorke, Dan Leno, Sir George Alexander, Fred Terry, and Julia Neilson—graced those historic boards.

Last, but by no means least, we may add that Alicia Markova made her first professional appearance there on December 27, 1920, as première danseuse in the pantomime *Dick Whittington*.

The Kennington pantomime was always one of the Christmas attractions of London. It was given twice daily for several weeks and drew people from far and wide. In 1920 George Shurley was responsible for the production. It was a heavy task and needed months of preparation. Shurley firmly believed that pantomime should be entertainment for children and be presented in a manner to appeal to the younger generation of playgoers; he was convinced that children in the audience seemed to enjoy seeing members of their own generation holding their own with grown-up actors and actresses in a lavish theatrical production. So invariably there were talented child artistes in all of George Shurley's Christmas productions, and he was always on the lookout for them, even in the summer; therefore he would attend end-of-term performances given by the leading dancing academies in the hope of getting new recruits for pantomime.

One of those searches had taken him to the King's Hall, Covent Garden, where a performance had been given by the pupils of the Misses Thorne, and he had seen Alicia give her oriental cymbal dance. He made some notes and filed them away for future reference. When he decided to produce *Dick Whittington* at the Kennington, he realized that he would have to stage a scene in the palace of the Sultan of Morocco, and suddenly he remembered the little cymbal dancer in her gold-tissue trousers. She would provide an ideal specialty number for that spot in the pantomime. Anxious to see what else she could do, he got in touch with Alicia's parents through Miss Thorne.

Alicia knew nothing about all this. When her father was approached by the management of the Kennington Theatre,

he thought that there could be no harm in his daughter's dancing in pantomime during the Christmas holidays. In any case, Guggy could take her to the theater and look after her. So he consented to an audition, but refrained from telling Alicia what was at stake lest she become overexcited or unduly disappointed if, by any chance, she were not engaged. He merely asked her to get ready to dance for a gentleman in the West End.

At the appointed time Mr. Marks presented himself at a rehearsal studio near Shaftesbury Avenue, with his daughter carrying her music under her arm. George Shurley greeted them warmly, and Alicia was told to change her shoes and dance for "the gentleman." In addition to the oriental dance, she performed two others. "The gentleman" seemed very pleased, and a conversation was held in a corner of the studio too far away for Alicia to hear. When they left, Mr. Marks took Alicia out to tea and ordered some luscious cream cakes because she had danced so well. She was delighted, but thought no more about it as they made their way home.

At breakfast next morning Guggy and Mr. Marks looked particularly pleased with life when they told Alicia that she had been engaged to dance in pantomime at Kennington. At first she was a little bewildered by the news and then she knew that it had something to do with her dancing for Mr. Shurley.

To say that Alicia was overjoyed at having put her foot on the bottom rung of the ladder would be absurd. It subsequently transpired that she did actually begin her career as a dancer by accepting this engagement, but at the time she was doing only what her father told her. She was not follow-

ing her own feelings, but following a course far too frequently mapped out for her by other people.

George Shurley offered the child £10 a week to dance twice daily in his pantomime, but as she was so young she had to get a special license from the London County Council.

She was examined by official tutors and doctors and found to be in good health and more than well informed for her years. Because of this she was granted exemption from school, providing she had a governess and guaranteed to put in twenty hours of study each week quite apart from her training as a dancer. She would be called before the tutors and doctors every six months so that they could satisfy themselves that her health was not being impaired and that her education was not being neglected.

Once the license was issued, the child was in a position to accept George Shurley's offer. The necessary contract was soon signed and the producer had the previously printed posters slipped with an announcement to the effect that the première danseuse would be "Little Alicia—the child Pavlova."

"Whenever I see oranges," says Alicia, "I always think of Kennington. Even now the smell of an orange takes me back to that first show and the first rehearsal. Once the contract had been signed, my father told Guggy that she was to take complete charge of me throughout the run. She was to escort me to the theater, dress me for the stage, stay with me in my dressing room between the acts, and take me home again at night. In other words, she was to be my keeper, and on the day after the contract was signed we set off together for the first rehearsal.

"We arrived at the theater only to be told that the dancers were rehearsing at a nearby public house, as the electricians were using the stage to try out some new lighting effects.

"Guggy, determined that I should hold my own in the company, had dressed me in a black velvet coat trimmed with ermine—intending that I should look the part of a miniature ballerina. Though she disapproved of taking me to a public house, it had to be done, and never shall I forget entering that room where the troupe of child dancers were rehearsing.

"It happened to be during a break between numbers, so all the children were sitting round the wall sucking oranges. The smell was quite overpowering, especially when so many were being peeled at once.

"Everyone eyed me with considerable curiosity, almost as if they had been anticipating my arrival. Later, it transpired that I had been engaged for the pantomime some time after the other members of the cast, and my appearance on the scene was something in the nature of a bombshell, for originally it had been decided that the leader of the juvenile troupe was to perform the solo dances. She was a vivacious young girl of thirteen with dark hair, large eyes, a tiptilted nose, and a sunny smile. Her name was Jessie Matthews.

"They were all eager to get a glimpse of me—the little vulture who had unwittingly come to snatch the dances from under Jessie's delicious little nose. There was tension in the air, and no one made a friendly move to put me at my ease. I suppose they resented my presence in the show, as it denied their beloved Jessie a chance to shine as principal dancer, but more than anything I think the ermine caused these orange-sucking youngsters to hate the sight of me.

"Nor did Guggy help, treating me as a princess, in her opinion far too good to mix with what she considered ordinary people.

"Eventually I was accepted by the company, though I must say I never really got to know them, as Guggy always insisted on rushing me off to my dressing room, where she guarded me as if I were a criminal, whenever I was not wanted on the stage. If the other children considered me a little snooty, they had every reason to do so.

"Jessie was kindness itself. As she had been a professional dancer for three years, it was all the more remarkable that she bore me no ill will when I was suddenly imported into the pantomime to take over her best numbers. She seemed content enough with a butterfly dance and a sailor's hornpipe, in which she looked saucily attractive. So all was well as far as we were concerned. On the other hand, Guggy and Jessie's elder sister were always arguing about their respective champions, and on more than one occasion when I wanted to stop and talk to Jessie, I was bundled off into my dressing room by Guggy, who isolated me from the outside world with a slam of the door.

"I began to hate that dressing room. At first I felt rather important with a room to myself. Let me add it was not a question of giving me a star room, but a case of obeying the London County Council, who insisted that I should dress alone, as it was against their rules for a child to dress with adults, and I also had to do a certain amount of study at the theater. While the other children in the show envied me the distinction of a room of my own, I felt rather like a prisoner in a cell.



"Immediately after the matinee Guggy would take me to a neighboring café for high tea. Then we would go back to the dressing room for a session with history and geography books, so that my education would not be neglected. Before the evening show I would also sleep for an hour. This was another of Guggy's commands. She would *tell* me to go to sleep, and, being an obedient child, I would do as I was told. I have found this early training most valuable in subsequent years, for now I can sleep to order, which is a most beneficial manner of passing the time on boring train and air journeys.

"I was given three dances in the show. I made my first entrance in the Highgate Hill scene. Not finding the streets of London paved with gold, Dick Whittington, at this point in the story, is about to leave the city, but from the heights of Highgate he hears the church bells. These cause him to change his mind and return to what turns out to be fame and fortune.

"The Highgate scene at Kennington was set in a cornfield at harvest-time. The Principal Boy, Ouida Macdermott, had a number with the chorus, and as they marched off, they left the stage deserted, except for a small sheaf of corn. From behind this sheaf, much to the amusement and amazement of the audience, I leapt as a small poppy. They could hardly believe that any child could be small enough to be completely hidden by so modest a cornsheaf. I suppose I was fortunate to have so novel an entrance, as I felt the audience were pleased and on my side from the beginning, even before I started dancing.

"Later in the same scene, after a quick change, I danced as a butterfly. But my big moment was reserved for the Sul-

tan's Palace, when I repeated the cymbal dance. It needed to be a more dramatic presentation in the theater, so the producer suggested that I finish by falling flat on my back and uttering a piercing scream. This stunned the audience, many of whom thought I had really injured myself. As I lay on the stage I used to enjoy hearing applause mingled with a curious sputtering sound which must have been an expression of concern on the part of many in front."

No one who saw Alicia on the first night realized that she was suffering from chicken pox. The attack was slight, but Doris had been sent off to Barnet, in case she should catch it and complicate matters still further. Alicia was lucky to have kept it at bay, as she had little resistance at the time the show opened, mainly because of worry about the orchestra. She pleased the producer well enough at rehearsal, but at this stage in the proceedings she was still dancing to a piano accompaniment. She had never danced to anything else. Miss Thorne had always used a piano at her studio, as well as at those public performances when Lily Marks had first begun to attract attention.

At the theater Alicia heard other members of the cast talking about band parts and how different their numbers would sound with a full orchestra. She began to dread the day when the musicians would make their appearance at the theater. The thought quite sickened her and kept her awake at nights. She was afraid of not recognizing her music when it was played by the band. She had agonizing visions of standing in the wings, sublimely unaware of her dance being played in the orchestra pit, and suddenly conscious of that dreadful hush which falls over an audience when they sense something

wrong. These doubts and fears made Alicia feel such a fool that she hesitated to tell anyone about them.

Fortunately all her fears proved groundless, as everything seemed absurdly easy and the conductor was more than helpful at the orchestra call. A great weight fell from her little shoulders. She seemed so enormously improved in health overnight, for reasons which none could understand, that Mrs. Marks thought it would be safe enough for Alicia to go through with the pantomime, even if she did happen to have a mild case of chicken pox. So the child triumphed over all her difficulties and won rewards which to her must have seemed very rich in those days.

This Kennington pantomime was something of a milestone in my life as well as Alicia's, as it marked the occasion on which I first saw her. I had hoped to appear in pantomime myself that year, and I had been to see J. B. Mulholland, whose pantomimes were as impressive at the King's Theatre in Hammersmith as were George Shurley's productions in Kennington. I cannot remember what happened, but for some reason I was not engaged, and all hope of a Christmas engagement fell through.

J. B. Mulholland, who took considerable interest in what talents I had as dancer, singer, and actor, told me that I ought to make a point of seeing Little Alicia in the Kennington show. He thought that she was rather a wonderful child and confessed that he had hoped to team us together, but she had been snapped up by George Shurley and he had been compelled to make other plans for his own pantomime. Even so, he suggested that Little Alicia should on no account be missed, as he felt we would make ideal partners one day. To

be sure that I went to Kennington, he even took the trouble to telephone the manager and have two complimentary seats placed at my disposal. I was most impressed, as I had never been the guest of a management before. My mother went with me, and I can remember feeling affluent, as our seats were free, and my five shillings pocket money remained intact.

I recollect we sat almost in the middle of the dress circle, but though Alicia tells me that she had three dances in the show I recall only one. That is as clear in my memory as if I had seen it yesterday. It was her dance in the Sultan's Palace. An amber spotlight blazed forth from the projection room just behind me, barely missing my head. The carbon was a bad one, and the result was far from quiet. It hissed continuously, and I was worried about the disturbing influence on the audience.

Soon I forgot about it, as my attention was monopolized by the stage. There, in a circle of flame, dressed in an exotic Eastern costume, bejeweled, and with a veil over her head, was a tiny figure. At first I saw no face, only a diminutive body, slender arms, and exquisite little feet. Slowly the veil was lifted, and the most serious little face came into view. No make-up could ever have enhanced the oriental contour of her features. They were Sphinx-like.

Such was my first glimpse of Little Alicia. Though she looked such a child, her dancing was sensational in its ease, attack, and precision. She was a past mistress of all she did, and gave the impression that she could do even more if demanded. For the first time in my life I felt an urge to express my appreciation of a completely unknown artiste. What

could I do? As we left the theater, I saw a man selling white chrysanthemums. It occurred to me to send the child some flowers, a thing I had never done in my life before. I could well afford them, as I still had my untouched five shillings. Much to my mother's amusement, I spent a shilling on a bunch of flowers and took them to the stage-door keeper, asking if he would be good enough to deliver them to Little Alicia from an unknown admirer.

We did not actually meet until the following year when, at the Chelsea studio of Princess Seraphine Astafieva, we became fellow pupils of one of the finest dancing teachers ever to come out of Russia.

The George Shurley pantomime at Kennington was always considered of enough importance to draw critics from the leading London newspapers, and Little Alicia's dancing was sufficiently impressive to make them take notice.

The *Morning Post* tribute must have pleased Alicia more than any, as it said, "Little Alicia, whom the program claimed to be 'The Child Pavlova,' went far toward emulating her great model." In the pages of the *Daily Telegraph* she read of herself, "Little Alicia, 'The Child Pavlova,' is a very accomplished ballerina in miniature, and even in the trying dance of Salome suggested much of its grim power." In the *Sunday Times*, "Little Alicia, described as 'The Child Pavlova,' more than justifies the title."

The critic of *The People* was so overwhelmed that he became somewhat confused over her name, as he wrote, "Little Alicia is perhaps the most wonderful juvenile dancer who has yet appeared on the stage." His colleague on the *News of the World* said the cast was completed by "a wonderful youngster, Little Alicia, aptly named 'The Child Pavlova,'

who gives solo exhibitions of remarkable grace and beauty for one so young."

*The Stage* critic must have realized how difficult the oriental dance was, for he wrote, "Little Alicia is the principal dancer, and a very clever little girl she is, too. It seems incongruous, not to say unfair, however, to saddle such a juvenile with a dance of the Salome order."

Alicia was pleased with such notices. She was in a reputable pantomime, holding her own with Ouida Macdermott as the Principal Boy, Dainty Doris as the Principal Girl, Dick Tubbs as the Dame, and with Jessie Matthews as her understudy, yet she had no definite plans for taking up the stage as a career. Kennington was simply an unforeseen result of her attempt to strengthen her left knee by undertaking what was popularly known as fancy dancing.

It was all rather bewildering, as no one imagined the child would create such a stir. It was certainly never her intention. Once again, echoing Miss Thorne's words, people said that "something ought to be done" about Alicia. But what? It was absurd to ask the child if she wanted to become a professional dancer. What child of ten knows her own mind?

On the other hand, there was no question of her having to earn her own living, as Mr. Marks was successful in his career and affluent enough to be able to run a Rolls-Royce. Even had the child expressed her desire to become a ballerina, she would not have received the same encouragement from people then as would be the case today. They didn't have the same faith in youth in those days. There was a tendency to retard youthful development in the 1920s, whereas it would be encouraged today.

It says a great deal for Alicia and her family that she did

not become precocious at this stage, with such glowing praise in the press and so many people paying her pretty compliments both in and out of the theater. It would have been enough to turn the head of any child, but Alicia's home, from the very first, was always a sane anchorage.

Mrs. Marks, though she worshiped her child, saw that she was given no preferential treatment. The four girls received an equal share of everything and so they enjoyed a normal family life. Alicia's connection with the theater in no way affected the family circle. The girls were naturally very proud of Alicia, but, as Vivienne says, when they used to see that frail little figure spinning on the stage, they could hardly believe she was their own sister.

In some odd way she used to pass out of their lives when she went to the theater, just as she might go on a journey to some distant place and, for the time being, no longer seem to be one of them. At the week end, the only time she had any leisure during the run of the pantomime, she would join her sisters in their usual pursuits and behave just as she had always done, quite uninfluenced by her triumph as Salome. There was never any question of jealousy or resentment on the part of the other girls.

That word "career" was often in the air during the run of the pantomime. In her heart of hearts Mrs. Marks hoped Alicia would become a great professional dancer, but as she was still very young, she had naturally never discussed the subject with her daughter to any extent. The mother had no desire to impose such a career upon her child, lest later her interest in dancing suddenly wane. She could think of no more dreary life sentence than hours at the barre for one no

longer in love with the art. Nothing could be done while the pantomime was running, with its twice-daily performances, but in the New Year Mr. Marks decided that they would make up their minds what was to be done and call in an outside authority to express an unbiased opinion.

Meantime Guggy took her charge by the subway to Kennington each day, guarding her as if she were a miraculous marionette. The only time the child left Guggy's side was when she went on the stage to dance, and even then Guggy was in the wings, watching that no harm came to her.

"She would have come on the stage with me had it been possible," reflects Alicia with a nostalgic smile.

Eventually the last night of the pantomime was announced. Guggy and Alicia used the family car that night to bring home Alicia's possessions. When Mrs. Marks saw the luggage dumped in the hall, she was reminded once again that the time had come for the next practical move.





Alicia at Two Years

Alicia at Age of 3½ Months



Alicia Aged Five Years



The Marks Sisters  
Alicia Doris Vivienne  
Berenice (Bunny)



Alicia at Five



Alicia, Her Father, and Her  
Grandfather



Alicia at About Nine  
(Upper Left)



At About Twelve (Upper  
Right)



And at About Eleven  
(Lower Right)



Alicia, at the Age of Eight,  
in Her First Ballet Dress  
and Ballet Shoes

Posing at a Photographer's  
Studio When About Nine  
Years Old



Alicia Markova with Her  
Mother Just After She  
Joined the Russian Ballet



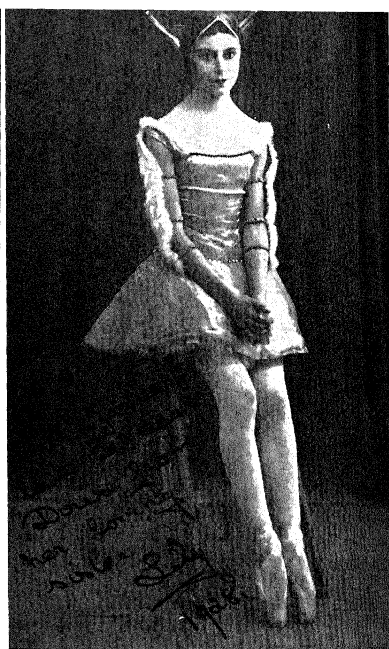
*Photograph by  
Topical Press Agency*



Wearing Cap and Gown at  
Cambridge When About  
Twelve Years Old



Papillon in Carnival c. 1926  
(Upper Left)



La Chatte at Age 17 (Upper Right)

Alicia at Monte Carlo at Age 14 (Lower Right)





*Photograph by J. W. Debenham*



First Production of Complete *Swan Lake* by Sadler's Wells

Alicia Markova, Robert Helpman, Jay Newton, Bunny Barry (Alicia's youngest sister)

*Marriage à la Mode*  
London, 1930

*Photograph by Navana*



Photograph by "Anthony"

Swan Queen in *Swan Lake*, Sadler's Wells (*Upper*)

On Tour with the Diaghileff Ballet (*Lower*)

(*L. to R.*) Tchernicheva, Mr. King, Markova and Mother, Savina, Dubrovskaya, Leon Woizikowsky, Danilova, Serge Lifar, Roger Desormières, Balanchine





*Photograph by Walter E. Owen*

Rehearsal for *Pas de Quatre*  
(L. to R.) Mia Slavenska, Dolin, Markova, Natalie Kras-  
sovska, Alexandra Danilova



*Photograph by Houston Roger*

Alicia Markova with Anton Dolin



Photograph by Walter E. Owen

On Stage in *Pas de Quatre*  
Mia Slavenska, Alicia Markova, Natalie Krassovska, Alexan-  
dra Danilova



*Photograph by Maurice Seymour*  
Markova as Camille



*Photograph by Maurine*  
As Camille

As Camille on Mexican  
Tour



*Photograph by Maurine*

Markova with Igor  
Youskevitch in *Rouge  
et Noir*. Shadow by  
André Eglevsky

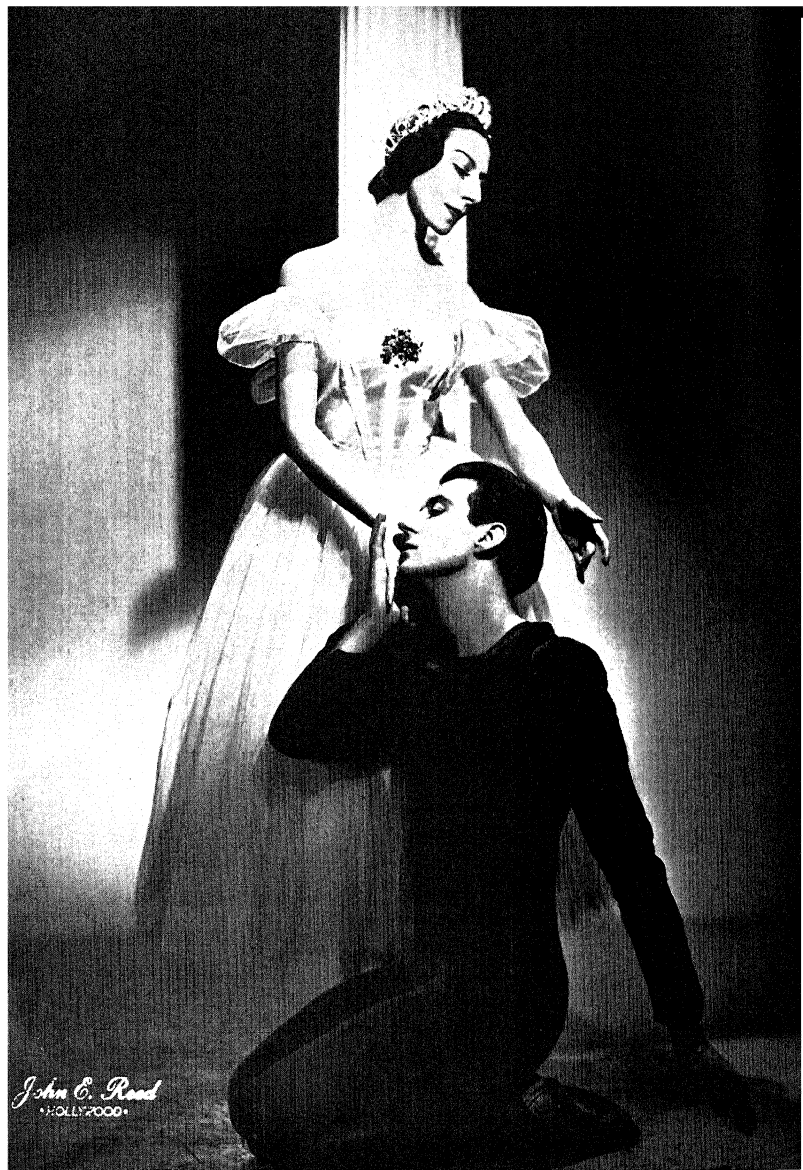


Photograph by  
Maurice Seymour



Markova with Mas-  
sine in *Vienna 1814*

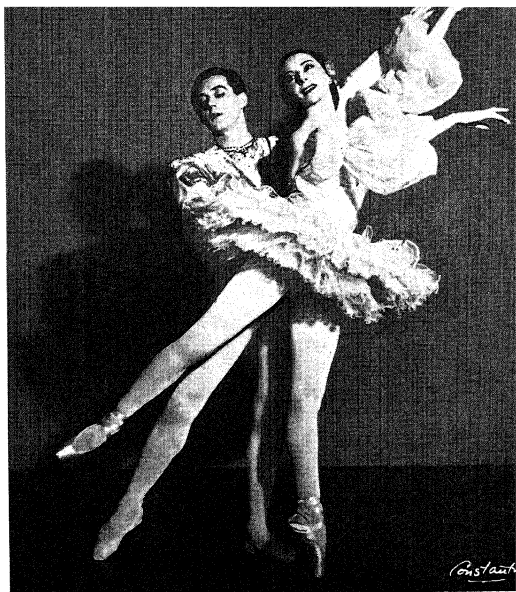
Photograph by  
Maurice Seymour



John C. Road  
HOLLYWOOD

Markova with Dolin in *Giselle*, Act II

Markova and Dolin in *The Nutcracker*



Constantine Photo



Markova and Eglevsky in  
*Sugar Plum*

Photograph by Maurice Seymour





Markova in *Giselle*, Act II

Photograph by  
Maurice Seymour

Another Pose from *Giselle*,  
Act II



Photograph by Maurice Seymour





Photograph by Alfredo Valente

Markova and Dolin in *Firebird*



As Autumn

Photograph by Annemarie Heinrich

Markova as Snow Queen  
in *The Nutcracker*



Photograph by Houston Roger

Markova and Dolin, 1951



*Photograph by Vivienne London*



*In Giselle, Act I*



Markova Backstage with  
Susie

*Photograph by  
Keystone Press Agency*

Dressing for *Les Sylphides*  
at Metropolitan Opera  
House



*Photograph by Constantine*

Markova Beside Bust of  
Pavlova at Museum of  
Modern Art, New York

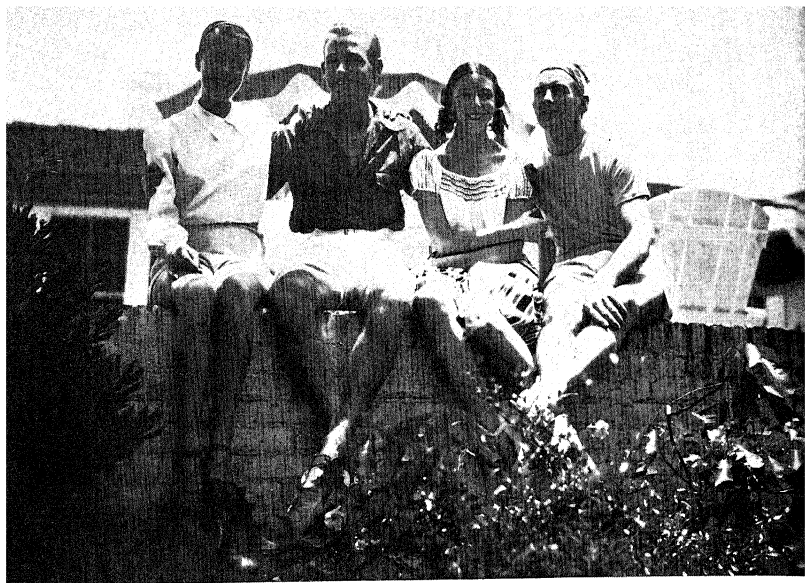


*Photograph by Murray Korman*



La Sylphide at Jacob's  
Pillow

*Photograph by  
Dwight Godwin*



Holiday at Ponte Verde (Top)

(L. to R.) Beatrice Lillie, Frederick Franklin, Alicia Markova, Anton Dolin      *Photograph by V. R. Deane*

Anton Dolin, Alicia Markova, S. Hurok (Lower Left)

Danilova and Markova Vacationing at Danilova's Home (Lower Right)



*Photograph by Eric Coop*

Markova and Her Sisters  
Vivienne, Alicia, Doris,  
Bunny

Markova and Dolin During  
Tour in South Africa

*Study by Jane Plotz*





*Photograph by Vivienne London*

A Study of Markova, 1951



## CHAPTER THREE

# ASTAFIEVA

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A charity matinee at the Shaftesbury Theatre, soon after the run of the pantomime in 1921 suggested the next line of action to Mrs. Marks.

The Thorne pupils figured on the program in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* sequence, with Alicia as one of the fairies, a part particularly suited to her elfin grace as she drifted about the stage with no apparent effort.

Holding a more conspicuous position in the entertainment were the pupils of Princess Seraphine Astafieva, one of the most colorful figures in the ballet world of her time. Besides being a daughter of Prince Alexander Astafiev, a grand-niece of Count Tolstoy, and sister-in-law of the fabulous Imperial Russian ballerina, Mathilde Kchessinska, Seraphine Astafieva was a very fine dancer in her own right. Her greatest triumph had been in the Diaghileff production of Fokine's *Cleopatra*,

in which she gave an unforgettable impression of burning pride and passion. She had settled in London in 1914, the first great Russian artiste to open a studio in England, where she proved that British dancers could make a mark for themselves if they had the right training.

Apart from admiring the work of these young dancers of Astafieva's school at the Shaftesbury Theatre matinee, Mrs. Marks, who spent most of the matinee backstage, was impressed by the manner in which Astafieva looked after her pupils, and fought for them, so that they gained the best place on the program and were seen to good advantage by the audience. Each girl was given an individual word of guidance or encouragement as she took her place in the tableau discovered on the rise of the curtain.

It was so skillfully organized and the girls danced with such assurance that Mrs. Marks felt that she ought to take Alicia to the Astafieva Studio. Madame could see the child dance and give them that outside opinion which seemed important at this stage of development. If she thought the child had no future, then they would at least know where they stood. If, on the other hand, she appeared to be impressed by Alicia's talents, she might even consent to give her some lessons. An early visit to Astafieva was the obvious course to take.

It was an unfortunate day for Mrs. Marks when she chose to take Alicia to be inspected, and possibly accepted, by Astafieva. She discovered that Madame held her class at a studio known as the Pheasantry in King's Road, Chelsea. So, without making an appointment, she decided to take the

child along during class one morning and ask Astafieva to give her an audition.

Mrs. Marks took one of the cards she had had printed for the Kennington pantomime, on which, in tasteful Gothic lettering, was inscribed LITTLE ALICIA—THE CHILD PAVLOVA. They arrived in the middle of a lesson, which, to begin with, hardly pleased Astafieva, who sent out word that she could not see them. Mrs. Marks refused to beat a retreat without some resistance. Perhaps, she thought, Madame would come out if she realized Alicia was *The Child Pavlova*. How right she was!

The card was sent in, and Madame came out—like a thunderbolt!

“How dare you call your wretched child a Pavlova!” cried the enraged Cleopatra. She could never have looked more imperious, even in all the dazzling jewels and exotic finery she wore in her Diaghileff days. “You not realize,” she went on scornfully, “that Pavlova devote her entire life to dance, and because this young infant has one or two lessons, can stand on her toes, you have this impertinence to call her *child Pavlova*! Ah, I not give auditions, and, in any case, I have no time—thank you very much—for prodigies.” Flaming with rage, she turned on her heel.

At that moment Alicia raised her voice in the form of a piercing wail. She could not bear the disappointment of not being allowed to dance for Astafieva.

The great woman’s heart softened a little when she saw this mite with her large eyes brimming over with tears. Much as she loathed anyone who dared to call herself *The Child*

*Pavlova*, she gave Alicia a second glance. She looked no bigger than a good-sized doll and must have weighed less. After all, she could not blame the little girl for the pretentious cards which had evidently been printed at the request of her parents. Finally Astafieva consented to see the child dance if they would wait until she had finished with her class.

Mrs. Marks agreed, and Alicia dried her eyes, as she sat down quietly between her mother and her governess on a window seat to wait for Madame to complete the morning's class.

Astafieva was cross, both with the interruption and the offending card, and when she reached the end of her lesson she instructed all the pupils to stay.

"Now we see what this little genius can do," she cried with biting sarcasm.

No one dared to leave the studio, and with their towels round their necks, to dry the perspiration from their exertions, they lined the walls in readiness for the humiliating display. For half an hour they watched Astafieva put Alicia through her paces, and saw the child executing steps with an ease far beyond the capabilities of most adult dancers. They were flabbergasted, and so was Madame. And they were still more flabbergasted when they saw Madame stoop down and kiss the child's forehead.

Turning to Mrs. Marks, and pointing to her daughter, Astafieva said, "This does not happen every day. Please, my hastiness you forget it, eh? How many loving mothers try to inflict their terrible children on me. Your daughter will be great dancer. She look like graceful race horse. She has strange beauty—she has speed—but she is very delicate. Take

ner home, keep her wrapped in cotton wool. At all costs you must take great care of her. Then perhaps we live to see her dance like the other great ones. Bring her back tomorrow. Eleven o'clock in the morning. She shall have her first lesson!"

She then gave the pupils permission to depart, and the studio emptied amid whispered remarks of wonderment.

Alicia began to cry from sheer sense of relief, but soon recovered. Mrs. Marks could only think of the folly of those cards, and decided to destroy the remainder without delay. She herself had learned from Astafieva a lesson in the value of modesty. When they reached home, she went directly to her bureau, picked up the bundle of cards, and dropped them on the fire in the sitting-room grate.

It was in Astafieva's classroom that I first met Alicia, the miniature Salome, to whom I had sent the white chrysanthemums at Kennington, and it was there that I first danced with her. At the age of eleven she had a technique which can only be termed fantastic. Madame used her as a demonstration model, to show the others in class, including many professional dancers, how certain steps should be danced.

I loved to partner her, and showed her off in front of admiring guests and friends who visited the studio from time to time. It was quite simple to make her turn thirty times on one pointe, or, having balanced her on one pointe, to go out of the room and leave her. Coming back, she would still be there, as motionless as a piece of carved ivory. We used to stand in wonder and watch her. Nothing like this had ever been seen before in one so young.

Yet what a strange child she was! She really looked older

at the age of eleven than she does now. At that time she had the same mature face which we know today, but on the tiny body of a child. The years have given her youth, vitality, and mobility of expression so that, to me, she is now far more lovely and attractive than at any time since I have known her.

Even at that early stage her technique was phenomenal. Yet one could not watch her dancing so surely and with such uncanny confidence without feeling that, because of her completely unemotional quality, something was missing in her. For it was almost impossible to realize her tender years. The dancing was perfection, but it was quite, quite cold. She might have been an exquisite little marionette turned out from the workshop of Dr. Coppelius, and just as non-human and heartless.

She never had a word to say for herself. She would answer a question politely but would never attempt to start a conversation. At first she did not mix freely with the other pupils and when not wanted in class, she would immediately run to her governess and stay at her side.

Astafieva's cat inspired the first signs of real animation I ever saw on Alicia's little face, and provided proof that she was really human, after all. When she saw this none-too-attractive animal, she rushed to it and murmured affectionately, as she had never done to a human being, as far as I knew.

I learned later that cats were her grand passion at that age and formed the one topic of conversation in which she took a live interest. It seems that Mrs. Marks had given her a black cat named Smut just before Doris was born, so that she

might not feel lonely or neglected with all the fuss made over the new baby. She was only four at the time, and could just manage to call her new companion "Mut," but they were the closest of friends and, like all subsequent cats in the Marks household, Smut was treated as one of the family.

Even today Alicia has an extraordinary fascination for cats. More than once I have seen the theater cat come and seek her out, even in places where we have stayed only a few hours to dance a single program.

The early days at Astafieva's were enough to prove to Alicia that she would never be a ballet dancer without an abundance of sweat and tears. It was her first experience of taking a lesson from a teacher of the old Russian school. She discovered that there were literally hundreds of steps and movements to learn, and each one was drilled into her until she felt like crying. Many times she did weep with Guggy in a discreet corner of the studio.

Though her knee had become stronger, it still pained her from time to time and made her wonder whether it would eventually stand up under the strain. When she had heard the audience at Kennington clapping her Salome dance, she imagined herself a ballerina, but she soon found that she had to start almost from the beginning when Astafieva took her as a pupil.

Astafieva gave one class a day. It was supposed to begin at eleven and last about two hours, but as Madame was Russian to the core and had no idea of time, it was often nearly one o'clock before she appeared. The pupils were quite happy and would amuse themselves by practicing pirouettes or by gaining early experience in the art of partnering. They re-

garded Astafieva with such devotion that they would willingly have waited for her until three or four o'clock.

Alicia used to attend class every morning, and also had some private lessons with Georgina Constable, one of Astafieva's star pupils, who later left to join the Pavlova company. Alicia preferred private lessons, and still does. She is never at her best in class or at rehearsal, and throughout her career she has always tried to budget for private lessons, even if it meant going without something else.

"As a teacher," Alicia recalls, "Astafieva had an inventive brain and devised most remarkable combinations of steps for her pupils. She prepared such difficult material for us and steered us through it so skillfully that no other choreographer scared us when we went out into the world to make our way as ballet dancers. We knew instinctively that we would be able to master his ballet, no matter how complicated it might be.

"I have always managed to adapt myself to the demands made by all the different choreographers I have encountered, and I thank my early Astafieva training for it. Astafieva fitted us to tackle anything. She would arrange a chain of steps and make us do them from the right, then from the left, and finally in reverse. She demanded that pirouettes be executed on both sides and both ways, so that her dancers were equally developed. She would spring unexpected commands on us while we were executing our pirouettes, so that we had to be ready to perform any number, and stop the moment we were told.

" 'Do four!' she would cry. 'Now six, two, four, one, three!' And so we had to be ready for anything. The great advantage of this training was that it developed the brain as well as the



body. That was what made my darling Madame so great a teacher. She taught her pupils to be quick thinkers. Sometimes she would devote the entire lesson to one step, varying the speed and the direction.

"She stressed the fact that our dancing lessons did not end when the class was over. Though we danced for only two hours each morning, she insisted that for the rest of the day we concentrate upon what she had taught us. There is a theoretical side to ballet and, as far as I was concerned, Astafieva was the first to emphasize the importance of contemplation on dancing.

"She was only thirty-eight when I had my first lessons with her. She was a great beauty, and moved with a grace which was a joy to watch. A woman of temperament and spirit, she was a commanding personality, and I felt sorry that I had not had the good fortune to see her as Cleopatra, for one felt the breath of the theater, even as she entered the classroom. She had what is known as a presence that could be felt, even by the less sensitive pupils.

"Though she was strict, I was never afraid of her. That stern approach to the work in hand simply made me more alive to the importance of discipline in a dancer's work and life. Every pupil was given individual consideration. She would not let me join the character class which she taught once a week, because she had singled me out to become a classical dancer, and maintained that character work would spoil my line and the shape of my knees, so I was permitted only to sit and watch with Guggy.

"As a spectator, I once went to the mime class, but never again! Being a highly sensitive child, far too easily impressed,

I was carried away by these pupils making strange gestures and grimaces. I had the most horrifying nightmare about nine cats, so I was never permitted anywhere near the mime class after that."

When I first saw Alicia at Astafieva's school I was still Patrick Kay. Not until two years later did I change my name to Anton Dolin. I suppose I was a rather flamboyant young man who quite fancied himself and his youthful good looks, and I took a delight in scaring Alicia with my exuberance. Secretly, though, I used to feel she enjoyed it all. I suppose it was the conceit in me, even at that early age, that enabled me to be at ease with people, and except for Astafieva, who always called me Patte—now only Alicia calls me that—I was known to everybody as Pat.

I told Alicia how I had first seen her at Kennington, but it was not until some years later that I told her about sending the white chrysanthemums. Her reaction to the first admission was a timed "Oh yes," and to the second, a smile of feminine pleasure.

She fascinated me, she was so small, like a doll. I used to tease her as one would a kitten and as one does at that wretched age of seventeen.

I suppose because I liked to pull her hair when Madame was not looking, she always tried, and nearly always succeeded, to place herself at the barre as far away from me as possible. Still, I was able to watch her and observe at the same time the envy of others at her uncanny ease and exactitude. I suppose pulling her hair and lightly pinching her tiny waist were hardly actions of affection, though I am sure

they were meant to be. Yet in Alicia they elicited no response. Neither of rebuke nor of pleasure. She remained quiet and composed, as if embarrassed, and not knowing how to respond. My own swollen sense of importance later on had for the first time, a justifiable *raison d'être*; I was a member of the famous Diaghileff Russian Ballet, though a very minor one, it was true. Still I could put on my visiting card "Patrikief, Corps de Ballet, Diaghileff Russian Ballet." Diaghileff had put my Christian name and surname together, and, as Patrikief, I first figured in this illustrious ensemble.

Though Alicia has always said that Anna Pavlova was the object of her first hero worship, I like to feel that perhaps I was the second. Not because of any attraction I might have had for her, but because of the glamour of my wonderful position, dancing in the great Diaghileff Ballet production of *The Sleeping Beauty* at the Alhambra Theatre.

If I was an object of wonder to her, I was no less an object of disappointment to myself. For only now, seeing real dancers, did I realize how insignificant I was and how little I knew. Only Alicia seemed to have at her command an equal facility for doing all the same steps that I was able to watch being performed by so many great dancers.

The most famous dancers in the world were gathered together for that unforgettable production of Tchaikovsky's most popular ballet—Spessiva, Trefilova, Egorova, Lopokova, Brianza, Nijinska, Tchernicheva, Nemtchinova, Sokolova, Doubrovskaya, Vladimiroff, Vilzak, Woizikowsky, and Idzikowsky. What a breath-taking collection of dazzling names!

I feel sure that chance and lucky contact with so many illustrious names at so early an age brought Alicia and me

nearer together at that period. We began to have a mutual respect for each other, she because of the fact that working together as we were in class and because I would soon be appearing on the same stage with these great ballerinas gave her a contact—a secondhand one, perhaps—with the important world of ballet and took her mind outside of the classroom. As I began to pay her more attention, she, in turn, seemed to warm and grow up.

As I have said, our teacher was not always punctual in beginning her morning class, and it was during those precious minutes that Alicia and I began to practice double work. I had watched how the two premier danseurs of the Diaghileff Ballet, Pierre Vladimiroff and Anatol Vilzak, had handled their ballerinas.

Alicia was light, pliable, anxious to learn, and even willing to suffer, at the beginning, my not-too-sure knowledge of the art of partnering. It was this wonderful confidence that she had in me then that above all else influenced our careers and carried us to the success we have had as partners.

Alicia saw *The Sleeping Beauty* four times. I taught her the adagios and explained the intricacies of the variations which I had watched during weeks of rehearsals and months of performances. She was fearless in my arms and, together, we gave each other a supreme confidence. Just as she sensed and knew she was dancing the great moments from the famous ballet, so I knew instinctively that this was no ordinary being whom I held.

Once, just as we were completing the pirouettes, the lift, and the final pose in the *pas de deux* of the last act of *The Sleeping Beauty*, we heard the voice of Astafieva, who had

quietly opened the door from her room leading on to the studio. "Bravo, Little Alicia. Bravo, Little Patte." I am sure she discerned even then that we would make ideal stage partners. Eight years passed, though, before we danced together the Blue Bird *pas de deux* in public.

I was not the only lifelong friend Alicia made at Astafieva's. It was there she first met Mrs. Haskell, mother of the ballet critic, Arnold Haskell. Mrs. Haskell had long admired Astafieva's work on the stage, and enjoyed coming to the studio, almost daily, to watch the lessons. She was keenly interested in Alicia's work and used to encourage her with kind remarks from time to time. Once she took Guggy and Alicia to her house to lunch, and she talked about the excitement the Diaghileff Ballet had caused in London during that first 1911 season, and told them that she had an undergraduate son, Arnold, at Cambridge. At a Christmas party some time afterward Mrs. Haskell introduced Alicia to Arnold, who was not then particularly interested in dancing. He had heard about Alicia from his mother, who eventually persuaded him to accompany her to class one day.

That one visit changed the whole pattern of his life. He fell under the spell of ballet. He saw that Alicia was on the brink of a career which he imagined—and she secretly hoped—would be spectacular, and he wanted to watch it step by step at close quarters. Since then he has devoted his life to ballet, observing it in class, seeing it at the theater, and reading every known expert, until he has become one of the greatest living authorities.

Valia Golodetz was another great friend Alicia made in

those days. With her husband, Nathan, she had just escaped from Russia after the Revolution, and came to Astafieva for classes. Alicia found her easy to talk to, and she seemed like a second mother to the child. Curiously enough, Alicia's mother took to her at once. They seemed like sisters, and soon Valia and her husband were friends of the Marks family. They gave Alicia her first ballet skirt as a Christmas present and, having studied her likes and dislikes, they chose pale mauve tarlatan.

I liked Alicia's new friends, and particularly Mrs. Haskell, who used to bring us chocolates from time to time. It was our custom, at the end of class, to perform a circle of pirouettes, which gave Mrs. Haskell particular pleasure, as she enjoyed watching us. I loved an audience, even in those days, and always seemed to work better when I knew I had one. Often before I started the pirouettes, I would walk up to Mrs. Haskell, bow in front of her, and ask, "What will you give me if I do two circles instead of one?" In this way, quite shamelessly, I earned many a box of chocolates from our generous friend.

Toward the end of her first summer at Astafieva's, Alicia had her first major disappointment. The great Diaghileff was in London, making plans for his spectacular revival of *The Sleeping Beauty*, which was to be the realization of a long-cherished dream. No expense was spared, and the greatest dancers in Europe were already rehearsing in London under Nicolas Sergueiff, a famous old Maryinsky *régisiseur*, who had come from Russia especially to stage this Tchaikovsky masterpiece. The ballet had never been seen in its entirety in west-

ern Europe, so preparations were going ahead with great excitement.

Diaghileff and Astafieva were old friends, and whenever he visited London, he would call at her school to see if she had any promising talent. It was at this time that Diaghileff first saw Alicia. Though she was only ten, he engaged her on the spot after seeing her dance Rubinstein's *Valse Caprice*. He had never hoped to find a dancer who was small enough to look like a real fairy while possessing the necessary technique to triumph over genuinely difficult choreography. Astafieva had indeed produced a miracle child, and Diaghileff was so pleased that he expressed his intention of interpolating a special solo in the ballet to show off her miniature artistry to perfection. She would add the last touch of enchantment to his production.

"She shall be the tiniest fairy who comes to Princess Aurora's christening," he exulted. "She shall be dressed all in white, and as she is so small, we will call her Fairy Dewdrop. The Lilac Fairy shall introduce her, and I will get Nijinska to arrange a special variation for her."

Then came a bitter blow of Fate. Two days before she was due to go to the Alhambra for her first rehearsal, Alicia was stricken with diphtheria and rushed to the hospital. The contract had to be canceled. There was no time to wait for her recovery, and in any case, there was the possibility that she might never be strong enough to return to the ballet after so serious an illness.

I was distressed to hear of this tragedy, but as I thought of Alicia lying in the hospital, I wondered if she quite

realized the great honor which illness had so cruelly snatched from her. I could do no more than wonder, for her quietness, her almost morbid lack of verbal expression, gave no hint of her thoughts. Only now, after many years, when Alicia recalls the sad chapter, can I appreciate what must have been happening in her mind at the time.

"I felt," says Alicia, "that I did not care very much whether I lived or died. It might almost be better to die. I had lived in such close touch with the ballet world at Astafieva's that I fully realized that Diaghileff's production of *The Sleeping Beauty* might well be the greatest artistic event of my lifetime. Subsequent history has proved that I was not far wrong.

"After some days of complete listlessness, with the haunting Tchaikovsky music continually in my head, I felt an urge to see the production at the Alhambra. That was surely something to live for. I could see the ballet, even if I could not dance in it. Having expressed that wish, I began to get better, as I had a reason for wanting to get well. As soon as I was on my feet again I was taken to see *The Sleeping Beauty* for the first time. I went four times in all, and saw both Spessiva and Trefilova as Aurora.

"I shall always be grateful for being old enough to appreciate that great artistic treat, because I am quite convinced that I shall never see anything like it again. The magnificent Bakst *décor* and costumes, the Tchaikovsky music, and the incomparable dancing of the entire cast left one intoxicated with beauty.

"For the first time in my life I really wanted to become a dancer. I felt happier than ever to think that Diaghileff had



given me the opportunity to dance beside the Lilac Fairy. It was a great consolation to know that he thought me good enough to take a leading part in a production that was perfection itself. It made me very proud, and gave me terrific determination to overcome any difficulties the future offered. I knew what I wanted, and I decided that all my time and energy should be devoted to my work. I set myself a goal and determined to attain it if I died in the effort."

After two years of painstaking work, Astafieva considered Alicia good enough to appear in public. The occasion was a milestone for both of us, in my case marking the birth of Anton Dolin. At the Albert Hall, on Tuesday evening, June 26th, 1923, Astafieva gave a performance with her company of Anglo-Russian dancers. I discarded my name of Patrick Kay and appeared for the first time as Anton Dolin, dancing Rimski-Korsakov's *Hymn to the Sun*, a *Danse Russe* by Féodor Kolin, and a Chopin mazurka. Astafieva herself danced to Gounod's *Ave Maria*.

Recalling the storm caused by the Child Pavlova card two years previously, it is amusing to know that Alicia was presented by Astafieva as "Little Alicia, The Miniature Pavlova." Mrs. Marks must have smiled secretly as she glanced at the program. Obviously Astafieva must have felt that there was some truth engraved on the card, after all, because she chose for Alicia two of Pavlova's most famous solos—*The Dying Swan* and *The Dragonfly*.

The critics were impressed. Alicia must have felt that the grind and drudgery of the past two years had been worth while when she read in the *Daily Mirror* that the feature of the evening was "the performance of Little Alicia, a clever

twelve-year-old child, described as 'The Miniature Pavlova,' who combined the *sang-froid* of a prima ballerina with the daintiness and freshness of youth." The *Star* critic was obviously won over as he wrote; "Little Alicia is handicapped at the start of her career by program comparison with the peerless Pavlova, but she danced her way into the affections of her audience." Even the *Daily Chronicle* encouraged her, despite the reserve of the notice which read, "The young child, Alicia, described repeatedly as 'The Miniature Pavlova,' has certainly the makings of a dancer, but I thought she attempted things far too difficult and strenuous for a child of her years."

This fleeting contact with the public and the press had an exhilarating effect, and sent Alicia back to the classroom with renewed vigor and enthusiasm to prepare for her next appearance.

Four months later Nicolas Legat, the great Russian dancer and teacher, the first to foresee Nijinsky's phenomenal leap, presented a troupe of Russian Art dancers at the London Palladium, with his wife, the ballerina Nadejda Nicolaeva, whom I was to partner. Alicia was engaged to dance a solo. There is little to record about her engagement beyond the fact that she was interviewed by the press for the first time. A representative of the *Pall Mall Gazette* called on her.

"Expecting to find a precocious modern infant," he wrote, "I was agreeably surprised at being confronted instead by a shy little girl with an elfin face and large dark eyes, in a very short coat and pokebonnet, hugging an enormous doll.

" 'Yes,' she said shyly, in answer to a question, 'I am most excited about appearing with real Russian dancers in a Lon-

don theater. I hope people will like me. It is very hard work dancing. I practice steps and positions five hours steadily every day. Then I have also my lessons to learn with my governess besides. I like them, too, but I would rather play with my dolls than do arithmetic or history. I want to be a great dancer when I grow up, like Madame Pavlova. Before Madame left for America, I went to tea with her. She was most sweet to me and wanted to take me with her.' "

It comes as something of a shock to read of an artiste who has "the sang-froid of a prima ballerina" going home and playing with her dolls, but the fact remains that despite her phenomenal talent Alicia was still a child. A little later, just before the Wembley Exhibition opened in 1924, her father was called in by Sir Robert McAlpine to get the work finished so that the Exhibition could be opened on the scheduled date. During the last stages of preparation he often took the girls along with him, after Alicia had finished her class at Astafieva's. The children adored the Queen's Doll's House, and helped to unpack the miniature treasures with which it was furnished.

Their next favorite attraction was the Fun Fair, where they charmed the stall holders, who allowed them to try everything for nothing, and sometimes gave each one a prize to take home. They hoped to go on the mighty switchback railway, and were present the day it was being tried out. Suddenly there was a hideous scream, a grinding of brakes, and a rush to the rescue. A workman had been killed. The girls were packed off home, and none of them has ever expressed a desire to go on a switchback since.

A greater tragedy was lying in wait for them just around

the corner. Soon after the opening of Wembley, Alicia's father invested his entire fortune into an art cork invention in which he was interested. It failed, and the man who had persuaded him to invest his money proved to be a rogue and a scoundrel. He was imprisoned, but it was of little consolation to Tristman Marks, who suddenly found himself penniless. The shock proved too much for him. His health collapsed, and he died with tragic suddenness, leaving a widow and four daughters to face the world with no visible means of support.

I had been concerned about Alicia's future for some time before her father's death. After the catastrophic failure of *The Sleeping Beauty* at the Alhambra, the Diaghileff Ballet appeared to be in such dire financial straits that it looked at one time as if it might have to be disbanded. I could have gone with the remnants of the company to Monte Carlo where, in a few months, Diaghileff re-established his company under the protection of the Prince of Monaco, but I decided to stay in London. For three months I had seen real ballet and dancing and realized how little I knew. So I returned to Astafieva's, studying seriously, in the hope of becoming a great dancer, so that one day I could take my place as an important member of the Diaghileff Russian Ballet.

I rejoined the Diaghileff Ballet Company in Monte Carlo nearly two years later. My first partner was Vera Nemtchinova, one of Diaghileff's great ballerinas, and one with whom I enjoyed a very happy partnership. Often, while I was abroad with the company, especially in class, I would think of Alicia,

wondering how many pirouettes she was doing at Astafieva's, and if she ever encountered a technical feat beyond her powers. I felt that the time had come for her to join the Diaghileff company, which was the only ballet company in the world that mattered in those days.

We never met outside the classroom, or wrote to each other, so I knew nothing of her home life and precious little about her. But whenever I did see her, I was always conscious of an abnormal sadness in her, and in one so young and so talented, it didn't seem right.

When I came back for the 1924 winter season of the Diaghileff Ballet at the London Coliseum, where I was to make my debut in *Le Train Bleu*, I was determined to try to do something for Alicia. When I heard of the tragedy which had struck her family life, I knew something must be done at once.

As ill luck would have it, the time was not propitious to approach the great Serge Pavlovich Diaghileff. The London press was stating that for the first time in the history of the Russian Ballet the outstanding artistes of this foreign company were English—the great Lydia Sokolova (Hilda Munnings), Vera Savina—Leonide Massine's first wife, whose real name was Vera Clarke—and myself, whose success was entirely due to the great Diaghileff himself who had had Jean Cocteau, Darius Milhaud, and Bronislava Nijinska write, compose, and choreograph *Le Train Bleu* especially for me.

But Diaghileff, well known for his moods, was far from pleased at this publicity.

Soon after my return to London I summoned up my cour-

age and reminded him about Alicia, whom he had considered good enough to dance in *The Sleeping Beauty*. His reaction was far from pleasant.

"No more English dancers!" was his emphatic reply.

No words, no persuasion could change his mind. I begged him to see her dance, but all to no avail.

Several times during the season I had gone over to Chelsea to Astafieva's class, to see Alicia dance. Except that she seemed more precise than ever, time had wrought no change in her. She was still the phenomenon, the wonder child, who had to be seen to be believed. She was still no more than a perfectly tuned machine. She lacked any kind of feeling. And from having this fact constantly drummed into her, I think she more than ever retired into herself. Why she was expected to have feelings and be emotional I do not know. It was hard to watch the perfection of her dancing and at the same time realize that she was such a child. Despite her tender years and that slender, almost spidery little body and legs, her face was already that of a mature woman.

Astafieva was even more worried than I. She knew that Alicia's mother was desperate for money and had already considered discontinuing the little girl's lessons. Astafieva would not hear of this.

Dear Astafieva, it was not only to Alicia and to me that you said, "Ah, you pay one day. Now you learn to be great dancer. Yes? No?"

Then she and I hit upon a plan for bringing Alicia to Diaghileff's attention. Russian Christmas was imminent, so Astafieva decided to give a party at her studio for the members of the Diaghileff Ballet, of which she had once been a member.

Surely even the mighty Serge Pavlovich Diaghileff would not refuse her invitation. True, it was a plot and a trap, but we were quite shameless about it.

The party was attended not only by Serge Pavlovich but by all the leading dancers of his company and many of his London friends, as well as Mrs. Haskell, her son Arnold, and Valia and Nathan Golodetz.

At a given signal by Astafieva, the studio was cleared. The guests were seated all around the room and those who could not find chairs sat on the floor. Someone at the piano played a few introductory chords to Rubinstein's *Valse Caprice*. The large double doors at the side of the studio opened, and Alicia appeared. Little did she realize that she was at the great turning point in her life.

A deathly silence prevailed as she danced. Her performance was cold and strangely unreal. I smiled as I saw the great Diaghileff ballerinas watch this little English girl of thirteen dancing so technically correct and so flawlessly right that she must have made even them a little envious. She turned three, four pirouettes on the toe with an ease that was almost uncanny. She jumped high and effortlessly into the air, and her little feet made no sound as they touched the floor.

The applause was terrific, with far more fervor than could be expected from a studio full of celebrities. I cast a searching glance at Diaghileff, anxious to find out if our ruse had worked. I knew at once that Alicia had captivated him. His eyes lit up in wonderment and honest amazement. Getting up from his chair, he embraced the little dancer. There were tears in his eyes. Words for once seemed to fail him as he clasped her closely to him. Then he turned to Astafieva.

"Seraphine, you have given a genius to the world," he said. "The ballet has found its next generation. We know that the classic dance will live long after us. I will take this child into my company. Her name shall be—let me see—Alicia Markova!"

So Lilian Alicia Marks became Alicia Markova at the word and will of Serge Diaghileff.

Yet another token of homage was paid to the child before she left the studio on that eventful night. As Astafieva fondly embraced her on the doorstep, she said, "Now you are no longer a little girl; you become an artiste!"

But our victory was not really so easy as all that. When the matter was discussed with Diaghileff he indicated that he did not intend to take Alicia into his ballet until she was seventeen or eighteen. That was too much for us to bear. Astafieva pleaded for the child, explaining the financial status of her family, emphasizing that Alicia's talents as a dancer remained their sole hope of income. She had to get a job, and at once. If Diaghileff would not take her into his company, she would have to accept an engagement at Drury Lane, dancing in a new Fokine ballet as a fairy in the Christmas production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

That announcement turned the scales in Alicia's favor. Though dancing in a ballet to be choreographed by the great Fokine was no small matter, it meant, as Diaghileff knew, eight, perhaps twelve, performances a week. For one so frail he could see the strain would be hard to bear and perhaps even result in temporary, if not permanent, injury to those soon-to-be-valuable limbs.

He consented to take her, but as there had never been a




child in the ballet before, he insisted upon her being accompanied either by her mother or a governess. As his Coliseum season was drawing to a close, he consented to take her, providing she joined the company in Monte Carlo about the middle of January.

Alicia received the momentous news on the first day of December 1924, her fourteenth birthday.



## CHAPTER FOUR

# DIAGHILEFF



To give Alicia some idea of the standard of the great company she was about to join, Diaghileff invited her to the Coliseum to see one or two performances. Each time he met her in the foyer and then sat with her during the ballet, explaining in a soft whisper the finer points of the dancing, so that she would derive full benefit from the experience.

The company were amazed to see the great Serge Pavlovich, before whom the greatest ballerinas in the world bowed their heads in awe and respect, taking so deep a personal interest in this mite he had discovered at Astafieva's. Such a thing had never happened before, as he usually had no time for children and still less for prodigies.

The first time Alicia attended the ballet with Serge Pavlovich whom, much to his delight, she was soon to call Sergypop, she saw *Aurora's Wedding*, in which, for the first time,

I was dancing the Blue Bird pas de deux with Alice Nikitina. Alicia was entranced with this particular ballet, as it recalled the finale of those glorious *Sleeping Beauty* nights at the Alhambra.

She was excited to think that she would soon be dancing on the same stage as these great artistes, in London, and in cities on the Continent. It was a thrilling thought for a girl of fourteen who had never been farther away from London than a south coast resort for her annual holiday.

It was something beyond a thrill for poor Mrs. Marks. It was a problem which at times seemed to defy a solution. Nothing more wonderful could have happened than Diaghileff's invitation to Alicia to join his company, which was without a rival during the twenty years of its existence and which has never been matched since. But it was far from easy for a penniless widow with four daughters to send one of them off to Monte Carlo with a governess and expect both to live on Alicia's corps de ballet salary of fifty shillings a week. Even in the good old days of 1925 it was not possible for two people to keep body and soul together on so modest an income.

Without a fairy godmother, Mrs. Marks would have had to decline Diaghileff's unprecedented offer. Alicia would have gone to Drury Lane as one of the Christmas fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the world might have lost one of the greatest ballerinas of all time.

Mrs. Haskell was the fairy godmother. She had seen Alicia flower under Astafieva's instruction and had seen the great Diaghileff melt before her. No one was more thrilled on the night Diaghileff kissed the child. Mrs. Haskell knew that

Mrs. Marks would find it difficult, if not impossible, to send Alicia to Monte Carlo, but she was determined that lack of money should not deprive the world of possibly another great ballerina.

She had some of her own dresses altered to supplement the child's modest wardrobe, but the most wonderful gift of all was a fur coat, one formerly worn by Mrs. Haskell, which she had had remodeled for Alicia. She knew what a boon it would be to her, traveling all over the Continent in the depths of winter, often having to sit up all night in chilly railway compartments, as the expense of a *wagon-lit* would be out of the question. The final going-away present from the Haskells, mother and son, was a fitted dressing case in Alicia's favorite shade of mauve.

Incidentally, it was Mrs. Haskell who, four years later, bought Alicia her first evening dress. Diaghileff had given the girl permission to attend her first London party officially as a member of the company.

Alicia was more than happy with the altered garments which her fairy godmother had given her and with the modest but more than useful monthly allowance which Mrs. Haskell sent Guggy, to be used on Alicia's behalf. Mr. and Mrs. Golodetz rallied to her aid by giving her mother financial assistance, and saved the situation at a later date by looking after the younger children during the school holidays so that Mrs. Marks could remain abroad with Alicia after Guggy ceased to be her guardian.

The Christmas holidays of 1924 were busily occupied with getting things ready for Alicia's departure. One difficulty after another was overcome, until finally it appeared she had

all she needed to make the journey and to live in Monte Carlo for three or four months. It was more than a triumph for Mrs. Marks, who seemed to have performed a miracle.

Diaghileff had warned them about a possible difficulty in getting the child out of the country, as no British artiste under the age of sixteen was permitted to work abroad. She might, he said, be stopped by the police at Victoria and sent back home. That was too terrible an eventuality to contemplate, but they had to be ready for it. Guggy had expressed her willingness to go abroad with Alicia and act as a foster mother both in and out of the theater. An old and trusted servant, who had already been with the family for ten years, Mrs. Marks had no apprehension about her daughter's safety.

Diaghileff had arranged for Alicia and Guggy to be met by Ninette de Valois, a young English dancer who had already been a member of his company for more than a year, at the barrier of the Continental Departure platform at Victoria. Ninette, who spoke French fluently, promised to look after Alicia and her governess, escort them across France, and make sure they caught the right trains in Calais and Paris, where they were to break their journey for the night.

The dawn of the eventful day struggled through one of those dense fogs which occur in London and nowhere else in the world. Alicia was all of a twitter for fear they missed the train, through their taxi being held up, with visibility reduced to a matter of yards. Mrs. Marks calmed her by saying that as the police were less likely to see her in the fog, she stood a much better chance of getting away.

Ninette was at the barrier, and as soon as she saw a frail child with enormous eyes she knew that she had met her traveling companion. Just in time Alicia was hustled into the train and within a matter of seconds she disappeared into the fog on the first stage of her journey toward fame.

In one way Mrs. Marks really lost her daughter that foggy day. They had always been devoted to each other, but so completely did Alicia give herself up to her career that mother and daughter never had the chance to enjoy the same intimate relationship they had known before the ballet became the dominating consideration of their lives.

Terpsichore is a hard and possessive mistress. From the moment the boat train steamed out of Victoria Station the ballet became Alicia's one and only thought. Everything else, even her family, took second place. For her personal enjoyment she had only the fraction of her life that remained after the ballet had taken its toll.

The fog lifted soon after they reached the borders of Kent, and Alicia began to consider the significance of this first trip abroad. She began to see her dancing in the right light. It was a means to an end. It was the thing she did best in life and was the only means of earning money for the family. She considered herself very lucky. Whereas most girls of fourteen were still at school, she was engaged by Serge Diaghileff, the director of the greatest ballet company in the world.

True her corps de ballet salary was insufficient to cover her expenses, but she had no intention of staying in the corps all her life. She would work harder than ever and become such a great dancer that managers would vie with each

other to present her. She would be able to keep her mother and sisters in comfort and show her gratitude and appreciation for all they had done.

When the travelers reached Paris, Mrs. Golodetz was at the station and took Alicia and Guggy to a hotel to spend the night as her guests. During dinner she dispelled any fears Alicia may have had by extolling the beauties of the Riviera, the fashionable playground of princes and the most beautiful women in the world. Next morning they rejoined Ninette at the station to continue their journey south.

I was with the Diaghileff company when Alicia joined it in Monte Carlo. She stayed with it until Diaghileff's death four and a half years later, but I left after her first six months, to dance in musical shows in the West End and to partner Karsavina, Phyllis Bedells, Nemtchinova, and Anna Ludmilla in various programs at the London Coliseum. I did not rejoin the company until December 1928. Diaghileff was preparing a revival of *Giselle*. Having been approached by him to come back to the ballet, the added inducement that I would dance the coveted role of Albrecht with the great Olga Spessiva made me reject any other propositions. At our first meeting in Paris after three years, when discussing the repertoire, in addition to *Giselle*, Diaghileff talked to me about Alicia and of his intention to have her alternate with Spessiva for the *Giselle* performances.

Unfortunately, the revival of this great masterpiece never materialized, as Diaghileff died following the Covent Garden season, six months later.

During the season of 1929, when I was in Monte Carlo, I



witnessed the sensation already caused by Alicia's joining the company.

Diaghileff's unorthodox step proved so successful that De Basil followed his example ten years later by engaging Baronova, Riabouchinska, and Toumanova, when, in their early teens, they helped to put his newly-formed ballet company on the map. Alicia's career with Diaghileff paved the way for their early recognition. She proved that it was possible for a baby ballerina to arouse genuine enthusiasm in a discriminating audience, and to hold her own even in a company headed by Maryinsky ballerinas.

At the age of fourteen Alicia was already a pioneer in the ballet, a role which, together with me, she has played so frequently since, in helping to establish British ballet, touring the English provinces, dancing in vast arenas, and taking ballet by air to the far corners of the earth.

Though Mrs. Golodetz had said that Monte Carlo was the playground of princes, Alicia little dreamed that she would be commanded to appear before royalty after being there less than a fortnight.

At the end of January the hereditary Princess and Prince Pierre of Monaco held a reception in their magnificent palace and asked Diaghileff to arrange an entertainment for their guests in the grand salon. He chose a program of divertissement, danced by Vera Nemtchinova, Lubov Tchernicheva, Alice Nikitina, Anton Dolin, and Alicia Markova, the newest and youngest recruit in the Diaghileff ensemble, who danced to the music of Rubinstein's *Valse Caprice* and Delibes' *Sylvia*.

Alicia was dazed by the magnificence of the scene. The

salon blazed with light from crystal chandeliers, fire flashed from diamond tiaras on many a fashionable coiffure, and every corner was adorned with floral decorations of the most exotic shapes and colors. It was far more wonderful than the Sultan's Palace in the Kennington pantomime, and the lights of Monte Carlo more dazzling and brilliant than the amber spot.

Another excitement lay in wait for the girl. The guest of honor was His Royal Highness the late Duke of Connaught, and as both Alicia and I were English, we had the honor of being presented to him. He seemed a little at a loss for words as he bent over the doll-like ballerina who curtsied at his feet. She was so different from the dancers he had previously received in the royal box at Covent Garden and elsewhere.

Her first role with the company was Red Riding Hood in *Aurora's Wedding*, a part in which she looked curiously whimsical, and which she danced to perfection from a technical point of view. In my opinion it was unsuited to her strange and far from glamorous stage presence. It gave no indication of her phenomenal capabilities, but it was the first step in Diaghileff's master plan for grooming Alicia as a prima ballerina.

Monte Carlo brought very little happiness to Alicia, who lived night and day under the eagle eye of Guggy. Guggy, being the perfect governess, behaved more like a prison wardress than a guardian angel. All day and all night Alicia was with this woman who, though fanatically devoted to her, believed that to be kind to a child one had to be cruel. She had no sense of humor, so that Alicia never laughed, but lived all day and every day under the heavy consciousness

that she had consecrated her life to the ballet. Any thought not centered upon her work was regarded as something in the nature of a sin. Guggy fed her, groomed her, exercised her, and put her to bed, just as she might have looked after a performing poodle in a circus. There was no warm human touch about it. Nothing was ever *fun* when Guggy had anything to do with it.

She was profoundly serious and never permitted Alicia's thoughts to wander far from the straight and narrow path of ballet classes and performances. They had to try to exist on Alicia's corps de ballet salary. The amount varied according to the country in which the company happened to be dancing, and was as much as £7 a week in London, which was one reason why the artistes always enjoyed their London seasons. Both Alicia and Guggy were only too well aware of the financial situation of the Marks family so it was useless to expect aid from that quarter.

They took a small room at the top of a private hotel in Monte Carlo, not much bigger than the box room in a suburban villa. If by any chance Guggy had to go out and leave Alicia at home, she would lock her in their little room and take the key with her, fondly imagining that in this manner no harm could come to the child. It never seemed to occur to her that she might have lost her life had there been an outbreak of fire during her absence.

Through Guggy's precautions Alicia missed one of the few minor pleasures that came her way. Alexandra Danilova, who had joined the company the same year as Alicia, felt sorry for this sad-eyed child, shackled to her grim governess, who might have come out of the pages of a De Maupassant

short story. One afternoon she thought she would call unexpectedly at their hotel and take Alicia out to tea. She felt sure Guggy would raise her hands in horror at the mere suggestion, but she was prepared to face the dragon and take her, too, if absolutely necessary.

When Danilova climbed to the top of the house, she discovered nothing but Alicia's whisper behind the locked door. Guggy had gone to the post office to send a letter home and had left the little prisoner behind. Danilova was disappointed. Never had she encountered discipline carried to such ridiculous lengths. She even complained to Serge Pavlovich, feeling that his precious ballerina-to-be was suffering unnecessarily at the hands of her well-meaning tyrant of a governess.

On fifty shillings a week it was possible to afford only one meal a day in a restaurant. Alicia danced at the theater three nights a week, and then they ate their main meal at noon, but when she was not dancing at night, they ate their main meal in the evening. Apart from this, they existed on snacks and makeshift meals prepared in their little room. They carried with them a hatbox containing a spirit stove, an aluminum saucepan, and a teapot. This was facetiously known as *The Kitchen*, as it was their only means of boiling water for tea, heating tins of soup, or cooking eggs. Mostly they lived on tins of sardines, cold ham, and fruit, which were cheap and easily obtained in the South of France.

Alicia was always given a nightcap, consisting of a cup of Ovaltine, which she drank in bed while munching a couple of oatmeal biscuits. Once these had been consumed, the light

was turned out and she and Guggy retired, ready for an early start the next day.

Guggy made a duty of everything. Cooking in the hatbox Kitchen could have been great fun had it been approached in the right spirit, but with Guggy it was a grim ritual without a scrap of pleasure. To have smiled when an egg cracked in the boiling water would have been like laughing in church. There was always a constant tension in that dreary top room. If only Alicia had had the luck to share it with Danilova, who had the gift of transforming such mundane tasks as washing and ironing into the greatest fun in the world!

"Guggy meant well," reflects Alicia. "She was Irish and proud of coming from the same country as my mother. It seemed to bring her even closer into the family circle. Having lived with us for ten years, she knew all there was to know about me and enjoyed having a part in working out my career. She was determined that I was going to become a great dancer and thought she could urge me on by nagging from morn till night. She never showed any signs of affection, though I knew that if ever the occasion arose, she would fight for me to the bitter end. I remembered her antagonism toward Jessie Matthews' sister at Kennington.

"I suppose it was some consolation to know that I had a champion at my side, but I was never really happy with Guggy, and never saw another child. Even the other members of the company who wanted to be kind to me were frozen off by her, as she guarded me like a forbidding dragon. We never had any private jokes or exchanged an understanding smile such as might exist between two people living in such

close proximity. Unless the daily task was dreary, she seemed to feel it had no benefit.

"We got up at seven-thirty. Guggy would boil some water in our cardboard Kitchen and make some tea. Then she would wash and dress me and do my hair, as if I were a child of three. I was never allowed to do anything for myself. She seemed to think that the only thing I could do was dance, and dancing was the only thing I was permitted to do unaided in Guggy's lifetime. She escorted me to my morning lesson with the company, which lasted from nine o'clock until ten-thirty, and afterward would sit in the theater throughout rehearsal, without taking her eyes from me. She even changed my shoes when I arrived at class and put my street shoes on again afterward.

"I can see now that she did all this out of devotion, misplaced though it was. I was to concern myself with nothing but dancing. She felt her mission was to carry out every other duty necessary to my existence. When I was dancing in the evening, I was taken back to our room after lunch and put to bed, with the blinds drawn. In the early evening I would be roused, taken to the theater, and made up by Guggy in the dressing room. She would tie my ballet slippers, arrange my hair, fix the headdress, and then lead me to the stage, where she would wait in the wings until I had finished my dance. Then we would go back to the dressing room and go through the whole process in reverse. I was treated just like a precious puppet. I was completely helpless, for if I attempted to do anything for myself, I was severely criticized, told it was all wrong, and ordered to leave it to her. Though

I was only fourteen, I was developing a very definite inferiority complex.

"My education had to be taken into account, as the London County Council insisted that I study for twenty hours a week. Most of this work was done during those evenings when opera was being presented and I was not required at the theater. After our evening meal, Guggy would see to it that I was in bed by six-thirty, with my French grammar and my geography and history books. She would either sew or knit, so that complete silence reigned in the room while I tried to cram the facts into my head.

"It was no good just pretending to read the books, because I knew that the following day Guggy would question me about the chapters she had set for study. I could never get the better of her—not that I ever really tried.

"Her favorite form of punishment was stopping my chocolate ration. I adored chocolates, so Mother used to send me a box from home when she could afford it, and members of the company, who felt sorry for me as I went around with Guggy, looking the personification of misery, would occasionally ask if they might be permitted to give me some chocolates. Guggy never refused. She knew my weakness for sweets, and as long as I had a supply of them, she had the power of inflicting punishment by stopping the ration, which consisted of two a day. Incredible as it may seem, Guggy used to take me once a week to the cinema. I cannot imagine why I was permitted such frivolity, but it became an institution in Monte Carlo—as well as another means of punishment!

"Rather cunningly, Guggy used her chocolate fines as a

means of intensifying my concentration on my work. She sat in class each morning, watching either Legat or Cecchetti giving the lesson. If they singled me out more than twice for correction, I lost my chocolates for that day.

"There were times when I envied Monte Carlo children whom I saw in the street going home to their brothers and sisters. I suppose I was desperately lonely and yearning for some token of affection, but I was too sternly guarded for others to get anywhere near me.

"Guggy eventually imposed her chocolate fines at performances as well as in class, but as performances took place in public and thus were considered far more important than a class, the fines were correspondingly heavier. Guggy learned from an older member of the company that any dancer who soiled the pink satin of her ballet slippers during a performance ought to be ashamed of herself, as it was a sign of slovenly work. The satin should be just as spotless when the dancer returned to her dressing room as when she made her first entrance.

"Guggy was overjoyed to learn this, and informed me that I must never be guilty of such an offence if I hoped to become a great ballerina. After removing my ballet slippers at each performance, she would take them to the strong electric light of the make-up mirror. If she found so much as a spot or a streak on the pink satin, I lost my chocolates, not only for that day, but for the entire week, and, in addition, our visit to the cinema was canceled.

"It may have imposed a sense of discipline upon me and made me work harder, thereby helping me to perfect my technique, but it took a good deal of pleasure out of danc-



ing. I danced in constant fear lest my only two comforts, the chocolates and the cinema, should be denied me. Whenever I had the misfortune to stain my slipper, I despaired of ever escaping from a life which seemed to consist only of drudgery and distress.

"I missed Mother's kindness and the companionship of my sisters. Sometimes I would notice happenings in the street or maybe things in a shopwindow on the way to the theater and would feel an urge to write home about them. I derived a sense of comfort from sitting down and scribbling to Mother and the girls. I felt close to them as I wrote about simple, everyday happenings, such as the spring flowers in the market or the arrival of some foreign celebrity in Monaco. My letters had to be censored by Guggy, who felt that I was wasting my time in writing them. She said she was quite capable of dropping a line to Mother to tell her that all was well. I should be occupying my time with matters more vital to my career. In consequence, she criticized my correspondence so adversely that I ceased to write. What was the use of bothering? She killed any pleasure I might have derived from putting my simple sentiments into words for Mother and my sisters.

"To this day I am not a good correspondent. I often plan detailed letters in my head, particularly when traveling long distances by train or plane. I have every intention of committing my thoughts to paper, but somehow I rarely do. My understanding friends forgive me when I send them an occasional picture post card or a few press clippings to let them know where I am and what I am doing. But I sometimes wonder if I would write more frequently had I been

encouraged to send a weekly letter home from Monte Carlo when foreign parts were such an exciting novelty."

The limited leisure which any other artiste might have used to write letters, Alicia spent in the darkened theater watching rehearsals. Guggy seemed to raise no objection when she expressed a wish to pass away an hour at the theater during the afternoon. That did not strike her as a waste of time.

Often, as I dropped in at the theater during the afternoon to pick up my mail, I would see Alicia sitting spellbound in a corner of the stalls as she watched Grigorieff, our régisseur, supervising the rehearsal of a ballet in which she was not dancing. Obviously she was fascinated. Her eyes never left the stage. Guggy would be sitting in the next seat, as close as her shadow, usually sewing ribbons on Alicia's ballet slippers or knitting.

When activity on the stage ceased, Alicia was usually to be found in her dressing room enjoying the company of Pierre, her only intimate friend in Monte Carlo. Pierre was the theater cat. Alicia missed the companionship of her sisters just as she missed the affection of the family cat. She suggested to Guggy that they might buy a kitten, but the idea was soon dismissed. Alicia was soon consoled when she met Pierre. It was a case of love at first sight. Often she would find Pierre sitting outside her dressing room awaiting her arrival. He had a saucer of milk in the corner of the room, as well as a cozy bed made out of the lid of a hatbox and a badly worn pair of tights. Usually Alicia would choose fish for her midday meal, so that she could take a scrap to Pierre, which he enjoyed on his bed while she was dressing for the

performance. As I passed Alicia's door I would often hear a lively flow of conversation as she chatted to Pierre.

This friendship with theater cats became a joke. In each theater Alicia seemed to form an attachment for the cat, which invariably took up residence in her dressing room during our stay.

It was Peter, the stage-door cat at His Majesty's Theatre in London, who caused an order to be issued concerning the relationship between members of the Diaghileff Ballet and pets of the feline world. Like Pierre in Monte Carlo, Peter fell in love with Alicia, and all went well until a certain performance of *Les Sylphides*. Alicia was dancing one of the Miseries, as they are called in the ballet, one of the coryphées who dance two or three steps more than the corps de ballet and thus imagine themselves on the way to stardom.

The orchestra was playing the dreamy prelude. Grigorieff cast a final glance at the dancers grouped on the stage ready for the rise of the curtain. To his horror, he saw Peter's head peeping around a piece of scenery in search of Alicia. With only a split second of time, he dashed across the stage, and the offending animal was under lock and key before the static dancers melted into motion. After that incident, members of the company were discouraged from making friends with theater pets lest their appearance on the stage should wreck an entire ballet. So Alicia had to seek consolation elsewhere.

Diaghileff found the problem of casting Alicia far from easy. She was too small to join the other girls in the corps de ballet and, for the same reason, it was impossible to partner

her with the leading male dancers of the company, as they towered above her. As Alicia and I had partnered each other so frequently at Astafieva's, I wanted to appear with her during the Monte Carlo season, but there was so much difference in our height that we would have looked ridiculous.

With masterly cunning, Diaghileff fitted her into that great company, giving her solo work or parts which only entailed dancing *beside* a partner. Thus her miniature stature was not unduly stressed. Apart from her first role of Red Riding Hood in *Aurora's Wedding*, Alicia subsequently appeared as the naughty American child in *La Boutique Fantasque*, one of the warrior maidens in *Prince Igor*, Papillon in *Carnaval*, and, in *Petrouchka*, as the rich child being driven in a sleigh. She also appeared in the *pas de trois* from *Aurora's Wedding*, which was sometimes arranged for two men and a girl and also for two girls and a man. As time progressed, Alicia danced the lead in *Cimarosiana* and, becoming a general understudy, she appeared in all the difficult variations, including the Blue Bird *pas de deux* in *Aurora's Wedding*, though she never danced Princess Aurora until 1948, on our return visit to Covent Garden, after World War II.

Nicolas Efimov claims the distinction of being Alicia's first partner. Diaghileff decided to put on the one-act version of *Le Lac des Cygnes* and allowed Alicia, wearing an altered costume belonging to Trefilova, to dance the adagio, partnered by Efimov, who was the shortest of the male dancers. The same evening I partnered Nemtchinova in the Black Swan *pas de deux*. These performances took place during the opera season on a concert platform at the Salle Ganne, next

door in the Opera House, where Alicia also danced Rubinstein's *Valse Caprice* and the pizzicato from *Sylvia*.

Her first big chance in her early Monte Carlo days came when Balanchine mounted Stravinsky's *The Nightingale* on her with entirely new choreography. It was a good choice, as she was small enough to take on the semblance of a bird, and no partner was needed for her. She had only a pas de deux with Death, danced in turn by Sokolova and Doubrovskaya. I can still recall her fluttering hands and a series of beautifully conceived and executed turns on pointes, with the arms changing at each fourth bar of the music.

Matisse was responsible for the costumes, and fitted out Alicia in a sort of white pajama suit, possibly to camouflage her painfully thin legs.

Diaghileff certainly expected much of his little protégée, for though she was only fourteen when she joined the company, she was given this highly complicated ballet to study. No one could be found to tackle the music on a piano at rehearsal, so a pianola had to be used. This major task in her early days at Monte Carlo taught Alicia to know ballets by ear. With such a thorough and almost cruel breaking in, orchestrations were to have no fears for her at a later date.

It says a great deal for her courage and power of concentration to realize that she went through this very difficult period without so much as a suggestion of renouncing the ballet in favor of taking up the easier and more handsomely rewarding path of the commercial theater.

No doubt Alicia's early music lessons were of invaluable

assistance to her, though she never really cared for the piano. Once she took up serious dancing lessons at Astafieva's, she argued that as it was impossible to dance and play the piano at the same time, she thought it would be a good plan to drop the music lessons and devote the time thus gained to dancing practice.

When, less than six months after her departure to Monte Carlo, Alicia appeared in London in *The Nightingale*, the *Daily Mail* rewarded her with a notice that did not mention her by name, but said, "The Nightingale was a slim little girl whose angles made one think of a cricket, and her shadowy quality and beautiful dancing had a touching emotional appeal." Later critics said that every movement was a joy to watch and her dancing nothing short of marvelous. It was said that her dancing in the final scene with Death, impersonated by a very red and sinister Lydia Sokolova, had a romantic pathos which touched even the tough-minded votaries of the Russian Ballet.

Diaghileff must have felt very proud that the novelty of the company had lived up to his expectations and had come through her first ordeal with flying colors. Despite a certain amount of natural professional jealousy, the members of the company must have been rather pleased to see their baby earning laurels at so tender an age. Nevertheless they never gave her a chance to develop into a spoiled brat. They were very strict, worked her doubly hard, and never gave her credit to her face. The Little One in her ankle socks was kept firmly in her place. But Danilova, who was herself a newcomer to the company that year, would offer encouragement occasionally by popping a sweet into her mouth at re-

hearsal, yet it was all done surreptitiously, so that even Guggy was unaware of it.

The other big part which Alicia danced with the Diaghileff Ballet was *La Chatte*, Balanchine's ballet to Sauguet's music, previously danced by both Spessiva and Nikitina. When Alicia danced this ballet she had grown enough to be partnered by Lifar. She preferred *La Chatte* to the others because it meant real partnering, not merely dancing side by side with the premier danseur. At last she was able to benefit from our practicing together in Astafieva's school.

Another part which gave her great pride was the Blue Bird pas de deux from *Aurora's Wedding*, which she first danced with Tcherkas. Curiously enough, this was the pas de deux which we first danced together in public. It was at Covent Garden on July 26, 1929, when the last performance of *Aurora's Wedding* was given by the Diaghileff Ballet.

Seeing Alicia dancing with the great Diaghileff company was a source of considerable satisfaction to me, but I am not going to pretend that her performances approached perfection, dazzling as they were. Like any other child of fourteen, she had much to learn. When I saw her in the Swan Lake adagio with Efimov, I realized that though it was danced with a precision and a technique that put the rest of the company to shame, it was dull, just mechanical.

Later, I wondered if *La Chatte* would awaken something inside her to make the performance more exciting. The role was first danced by Spessiva, but I have been told she was not very good, something I can well believe, since the lovely Olga was a classic dancer of matchless perfection, and the Balanchine tricks of choreography could never have suited her.

Alicia followed Nikitina in the part. Again she danced the difficult solo and adagios without a technical blemish but quite without emotion. I began to wonder if and when she would show some sign, however small, of development.

By that time she had been a member of the Diaghileff Ballet long enough to have close contact with great artistes. She had heard them talk, had watched them at work, yet she absorbed nothing. She seemed almost satisfied with herself, as though she felt she was technically so far ahead of others so much older than herself that she wondered why she need bother to improve. Yet this was not really the case, for she was just as punctilious and tireless in her attention to detail then as she is today. But it was all so unexciting, and I began to imagine that to dance with such impeccable precision must have bored her.

Completely oblivious of any difficulty in the pas de deux from *Cimarosiana*, one of the most difficult of Massine's classical pas de deux, Alicia sailed through with effortless ease. I have seen many ballerinas who only just made the difficult unsupported two inside pirouettes, at the beginning, and I have seen others who failed. Alicia never missed them. The series of "One turn, two turns" that ended the solo and traveled around the stage always "came off." By such faultless execution, Alicia made the admittedly dull pas de deux even duller. It was far more enjoyable when danced with less exactitude by Vera Savina, and especially by Nikitina.

This criticism may sound harsh, but it goes to emphasize, by contrast, the supreme artistry and excitement of a Markova performance today. It emphasizes the transformation



of the timid, dull, almost boring child into the brilliant and glamorous personality that Markova is now.

After her father's death, Alicia felt rather unprotected against the dangers of the great outside world. The people with whom she was in close contact were all women—her mother, her sisters, Guggy, and Astafieva. It was Diaghileff who answered her prayer by becoming her second father. Alicia felt affection in his relationship as soon as she came to know him, and because of that she quite naturally and simply called him Sergypop, instead of Serge Pavlovich. Her nickname for him gave them both pleasure. To her, it suggested that he had taken the place of her father, as far as any other man could do so, and it assured Diaghileff that the child respected him and that she had warmed toward him sufficiently to desire his paternal protection.

He alone in the company gave her real encouragement, and as long as her work won his approval, she cared very little what the others thought or said. She was aware of her good fortune. He had put her under the finest teachers in the world—Legat and Cecchetti—so no outside interference could prevent her from becoming a great dancer. She had a salary, meager though it was, and she was a member of the greatest ballet organization on earth. That was cause for satisfaction, as far as her career was concerned, though she would have preferred a gayer home life than Guggy provided.

In some odd way this unsophisticated child of fourteen and the mighty Diaghileff met on the same ground, spoke the same language, and treated each other as equals. Alicia,

who was rather scared of people and never spoke volubly, except to cats, chatted quite freely to Diaghileff, without a trace of fear or restraint. She was never conscious of his being thirty-eight years her senior. The ballet was the only thing that mattered in both their lives, and that fact washed out any difference in age.

An incident in Barcelona, where the Diaghileff Ballet were giving a season, is sufficient proof that Alicia regarded the great man as an intimate friend. Diaghileff asked Alicia to call at his hotel one afternoon at four-thirty, so that he could take her into the country for tea at an inn where she could see some authentic Spanish dancing. It was to be a great treat for Alicia. She arrived at the hotel even ahead of time, with Guggy at her side. Impatiently she sat in the lounge, looking at the pictures in the foreign magazines, periodically going to the door in the hope of seeing Sergypop arrive. After an hour Guggy, furious, refused to wait a moment longer, and dragged her reluctant ward back to their modest dwelling. Diaghileff turned up at the hotel a full hour after their departure.

When they met at the theater the next day, Diaghileff asked where she had been and why she had not waited for him. Without a trace of insolence in her quiet, calm voice, Alicia said that she had waited an hour before being taken home, refraining from admitting that she would have waited well into the evening had she been allowed to do so.

"You broke your appointment, Sergypop," accused Alicia. "I know that you are a busy man, but that is no excuse for not turning up when you invite a friend to go out with you."

Diaghileff admitted he was at fault. He apologized and

invited her to come the next day. When she arrived, she found Diaghileff in the lounge ready and waiting.

Such consideration from one whom Alicia considered the greatest man on earth gave her faith and encouragement. It was wonderful to be treated as a real person instead of as a child, and that he should even bother to take her out to tea was most gratifying. Alicia was always touched when anyone paid her any attention or gave any indication that she existed.

Diaghileff would periodically give her money for eau de cologne, or ballet slippers, when she was doing solo work. He realized that she could not buy them out of her fifty shillings a week. Though he did not see a great deal of her outside the theater, he often thought of her. When she undertook a new role he knew exactly how much it meant to her. He felt the excitement as intensely as she did. He knew, for instance, how thrilled she must have been when, for the first time in her career, she danced leading parts in two ballets on the same program—*La Chatte* and *The Nightingale*. He sent her flowers, a thing he rarely did, even at the most glittering of premières.

It was a great help to know that the man she most wanted to please was sufficiently understanding to see all her ballet triumphs and tribulations from her point of view. It was gratifying to be given the opportunity to become a ballerina. Diaghileff cleared the path for Alicia and then directed her course.

Even so, life was not without bitter heartaches and disappointments. Alicia danced so well during the first season and won such favorable comment from members of the company and the public that she hoped for some sort of promotion

when Diaghileff asked her to sit beside him in the stalls one morning, to discuss forthcoming ballets. It was a compliment to Alicia that the great man always spoke to her in English, a language he detested and avoided using whenever possible. Secretly, she had been rather pleased with her progress during that first season, particularly as Papillon in *Carnaval*, during which the loveliness of her fluttering hands had earned such fulsome praise. To her dismay, she heard Diaghileff telling her that he intended to take from her all her roles except Red Riding Hood in *Aurora's Wedding*.

"But, Sergypop," she protested, "the company say I am dancing well, and there have been nice little pieces about me in the newspapers! Now you want to put me right at the back of the corps de ballet. Aren't I good enough?"

"My child," explained Diaghileff, "you are more than good enough, and that is why I am putting you in the corps de ballet. Last year you were a novelty, an infant phenomenon. You would have attracted attention in any case. Now, you must work and wait. You are to go right to the back and, by your own merit, work your way to the front again. Now you think me very unkind, but in years to come you will thank me for insisting upon such thorough training. I know you are capable of coming to the front, and before you are seen there, you must be an absolute mistress of every step you are called upon to dance."

Alicia accepted his decision without further protest. He must be right, of course, but it was a terrible setback after the glory she had earned during the first year. Having grown a little taller, she could now take her place in the corps de ballet without looking incongruous. Apart from her one re-

maining solo, Red Riding Hood, she danced as one of the warrior maidens in *Prince Igor* and was given obscure positions near the back cloth in *Les Sylphides* and *Le Lac des Cygnes*. Only after two years of incessant hard work did she win back her beloved Papillon in *Carnaval*.

Later Alicia was to realize that Diaghileff had no cut-and-dried rules for his dancers. By treating each one differently and individually, he obtained the best from them. He would be cruel to a dancer if he thought she would develop best under such treatment. He would even take away all her roles except one, if such ruthless methods proved the most effective manner of making her dance her best—"just to show" the others! He never allowed any dancer to feel indispensable to the company—not even Karsavina or Spessival! He seemed to get the best out of his artistes by keeping them keyed up and wondering what his next move would be. With masterly strategy he played off one ballerina against another, often withholding the parts they most coveted. No one dared relax or rest on their laurels, as there were always other splendid dancers only too anxious and capable of stepping into the shoes of the slackers and the self-satisfied. The sense of competition which pervaded the company produced results which have never been equaled since Diaghileff's death.

Alicia was a problem child in more senses than one. She was the first member of a ballet company to grow out of her costumes! Much to the annoyance and resentment of some of her colleagues, she had her costumes replenished more frequently than any of the other dancers.

This extraordinary child had a passion for black. As a toddler in Finsbury Park she had a great liking for a little

black fur coat, and at the time of the Kennington pantomime her favorite party dress was a black one, with a plain white collar. It seems she will always have this craving for somber colors, as today she is invariably dressed in black off stage. Diaghileff always dressed her in white, and most costume designers since his time have chosen white for her stage dresses, though she is capable of carrying off to perfection almost any color from flaming scarlets to pearly grays.

By taking infinite pains over her stage costumes and adapting existing designs to suit her extreme youth and fragile appearance, Diaghileff taught Alicia to know her weak points. Other members of the company said that in her growing period she was too thin, immature, and unfeminine to dance the roles which Diaghileff had given her. He recognized the usual signs of jealousy, but refused to alter the course of his master plan. He simply transformed her appearance by clever costuming.

Alicia was gratified to discover Sergypop was interested in her once more, and she gained enormous confidence in her stage appearance when she saw the results of the touches of genius he applied to her costumes. When she danced *Papillon* in *Carnaval*, he decided that the usual cotton dress would be too heavy, so he had a light, diaphanous organdy costume made for her in Paris, hand-painted, instead of being appliquéd, which gave her extraordinary lightness and grace. She wore transparent Victorian pantalettes to conceal her legs, which at that time were rather too thin to be considered beautiful, white kid gloves, and dainty puffed sleeves to hide her bony arms and give a further touch of delicacy to the finished picture.

One last master touch was the double row of pearls with which Diaghileff broke her long neckline. He admitted that lithographs of Taglioni had given him the idea. The great eighteenth-century dancer invariably wore a choker necklace. Her arms were long, too, so she favored pearl bracelets to minimize the length and never stretched them to their full length, if we are to believe the contemporary prints.

When Alicia danced *The Nightingale* in London she was not allowed to wear the white silk tights prescribed by Matisse in Monte Carlo. The Lord Chamberlain forbade women to appear on the stage in over-all white tights, so a close-fitting pajamalike costume had to be devised. To conceal the thinness of her arms, Diaghileff had the sleeves becomingly gripped by bracelets of rhinestones.

A storm of protest arose in the company when Alicia was cast for Nikitina's former part in *La Chatte*, dancers of more generous proportions complaining that Alicia had no sex appeal and looked so unfeminine. Once again Diaghileff restored her confidence by running strips of white fur down the backs of her arms and gripping them with silver bracelets. On her legs he placed mica shields edged with silver, as a counterpart to those worn by her partner, Lifar. The result was highly satisfactory.

Throughout her association with the Diaghileff ballet Sergypop encouraged Alicia to be particular about stage costumes, and often effected changes in the original designs so that his baby ballerina would appear to the best advantage. When she was about to dance the Blue Bird pas de deux from *Aurora's Wedding* for the first time, she did not like the costume previously worn by Vera Savina, as it brought back

rather painful memories of a serious stage accident in Monte Carlo. She remembered that while Vera had been dancing the Blue Bird, she had cut her arm rather badly on the jewels on Massine's costume when he was partnering her. She managed to finish the pas de deux, but collapsed afterward. Of course the costume had been cleaned before it was altered for Alicia, but the sight of the faint stain, which would not have been visible from the auditorium, so horrified the child that she could not wear it.

Diaghileff appreciated her feelings, and had the design copied in taffeta.

Alicia gave her first performance of the Blue Bird in Manchester, when the company was on tour. Diaghileff saw Alicia wearing the costume at the dress rehearsal. On her head she wore the ostrich feathers used by Vera Savina.

"That headdress is wrong," he said. "Ostrich feathers look vulgar on the child. They are not graceful enough. She must wear a turban with bird-of-paradise plumes."

Turning to Mrs. Marks, who was dressing Alicia at that time, he said, "Take this five-pound note and go out and get some blue bird-of-paradise plumes."

It was not an easy task in Manchester, at such short notice, but after considerable search, she managed to secure a spray, which Alicia wore that night and which she still possesses. She wore it all through the Markova-Dolin season, whenever she danced the Blue Bird.

When she made her entrance in Manchester, she had a sense of confidence. Sergypop had again taken an interest in her, so she knew she looked her very best, and, in consequence, she danced better than she had ever danced before.



Monte Carlo was always home to the nomadic members of the Diaghileff Ballet. They always spent the first four months of each year there, preparing ballets for the season. It was their workshop and their anchorage. They would arrive in January. During February and March they would give three performances of ballet a week, alternating with the opera company. April, when they tried out the new ballets in readiness for their annual tour, was a strenuous month. After weeks of hard labor in the classroom, they would perform the new works in public, before highly critical audiences and specially invited friends of Diaghileff.

The itinerary of the tour would vary slightly from year to year. In May the company would usually leave for a couple of weeks in Barcelona, followed by two or three weeks in Paris and three weeks to a month in London. After the London season Diaghileff would invariably go to Venice, while the company moved on to Ostend or Le Touquet for a short season before breaking up for their summer holiday. They would reassemble in Paris in September, in readiness for a tour of Germany, Italy, Great Britain, or possibly a winter season in London.

Such was the pattern of the life Alicia led during her four and a half years with the Diaghileff Ballet. It wasn't easy for Alicia to become a member of this company, which was predominantly Russian. As only four of the dancers—Vera Savina, Ninette de Valois, Lydia Sokolova, and myself—were British, very little English was spoken. All the rehearsals were conducted in Russian, except when Cechetti took them, and then one needed an additional smattering of Italian to know what was going on. With her quick brain and retentive mem-

ory, Alicia soon understood sufficient Russian and French to follow the gist of a conversation, but weighed down by her own inferiority complex, she never had the courage to try to speak either language. She simply listened and said nothing, which was a pity, because thus she missed the opportunity of getting to know some of the most remarkable painters, musicians, and dancers who ever worked together, all inspired by Diaghileff to think in terms of a new medium of expression.

The callboard notices were posted in Russian, giving details of rehearsal, times for the various ballets, and a list of artistes required for each one. Alicia soon recognized her own name in Russian script, and knew how the title of each ballet looked when written in Russian. When a new notice was put up on the board, she would study it carefully, noting each time her own name appeared and the title of the ballet with which it corresponded, and would jot it all down in a little book, together with the time she was expected to be at the theater.

On one occasion she misread the board and failed to turn up at a rather important orchestral rehearsal of *Ode*. Grigorieff was ready to fine her the next day for having defaulted, but when Mrs. Marks assured him that her daughter had been sleeping all the afternoon, he excused her. Sometimes dancers would play truant in the afternoons, in order to go shopping in Nice. Because of this, fines were exacted when they failed to turn up at rehearsal.

Discipline was enforced on the Diaghileff company. There were other unwritten laws for those who did not wish to incur the displeasure of Serge Pavlovich. They knew he was

fastidious and he liked his artistes to be well groomed, both on and off stage, and to behave with dignity in public, as became members of the most aristocratic ballet company in the world. He forbade dancers to take part in winter sports, lest they sustain some serious injury to their limbs, and he disliked to see women sun bathing, as he claimed no ballerina with a tanned skin could take on the ethereal beauty required for such ballets as *Les Sylphides* or the *Swan Lake*.

Besides acquiring a new father in the person of Sergypop, Alicia was soon aware of finding an elder sister and a big brother in the Diaghileff company. The sister was Alexandra Danilova, known to her friends as Choura, and the brother was myself, still known as Pat, despite my Russianized stage name. At home, Alicia had shouldered the responsibilities of an elder sister toward Doris, Vivienne, and Bunny, so she felt rather less lonely when Choura began to take a personal interest in her as far as Guggy would permit.

They were nearer an age than any other two members of the company, and, being unofficially exiled from Russia, Choura knew what it was like to be alone in a strange country, surrounded by people speaking an unfamiliar language, so she often had a kind word for the Little One from London. Alicia liked Danilova from the beginning because she made her laugh. Her innate sense of humor, which found amusement in the most ordinary, everyday occurrences, such as the breaking of a plate or the slamming of a door, reminded Alicia that there could be such a thing as fun in life, if you were clever enough to look at things in the right way. She wished that Guggy could see things from

Choura's point of view, it would make so much difference to their happiness.

In class, Choura was the first to praise Alicia when she perfected a difficult variation, but, on the other hand, she was the first to criticize her when she felt that the child could have done better. This bond exists between these two famous dancers today. They still pat each other on the back in moments of triumph and they are still outspoken when they are not altogether pleased with each other's work.

Nowadays Alicia is at her happiest when a guest at Choura's New Jersey country house. They forget that they are famous ballerinas. Together they take a jug and go to a neighboring farm for milk. Choura does the cooking herself and brings Alicia's breakfast to bed because she says the Little One works so hard. They have both shared star roles in the same company without a trace of jealousy or ill feeling. Their friendship is surely unique in ballet history. One cannot imagine Taglioni taking Grisi's breakfast to her in bed.

I often think of those early days in Monte Carlo when Alicia first joined the company. There was always something about her that made me feel that she was far from happy. Since those days I have often heard the full story of Guggy and the life she led. But I did my best to brighten Alicia's life, hoping that the fact that I had met her mother many times when she had brought her to Astafieva's class, and that we both lived in London, was of some comfort to her, bringing some kind of link with home.

Then I was exuberant, keyed up to a pitch of excitement and a youthful wonder at all that was going on around me,

but feeling the humdrum existence that Alicia was leading with her governess, I tried to take her out of it whenever it was possible. I felt that she admired me, more, I knew she was fond of me. I wasn't bad-looking, and I liked being flamboyant. Above all, I liked the knowledge that Alicia thought me goodlooking, and I did everything I could to impress her. Try as I did, I could not feel or play the part of a big brother.

I knew that taking her to the pictures was a Sunday treat for all of us—Sunday was our only free day in the ballet—because she could stay out late and, for Alicia, it was almost like playing truant. Though Guggy may not have quite approved of such goings on, I am sure to Alicia the whole occasion had the taste of delicious stolen fruit. I would not be refused, and would even brazenly command Guggy to allow her charge to go out with me. After all, I was the premier danseur of the Diaghileff Ballet, even if she had known me as a most insignificant Patrick Kay.

With the arrogance of youth, I was perhaps aping my elders when I took Alicia and Guggy to tea at the French patisserie in Monte Carlo. I had watched Diaghileff, Stravinsky, and Benois go to the counter where the most delicious cakes were appetizingly displayed in their layers and coats of many colors. I had seen Diaghileff take a delicious pastry in his hand and put it into the mouth of the lovely Lubov Tchernicheva with a charm and manner that were most disarming. I had watched dear old Alexander Benois eating, not one, but several huge chocolate éclairs, full of real delicious cream, in between sipping his lemon tea. And so, to emulate them, I would spend this lighthearted half-hour of teatime

gaily. I would play the big man and pop soft, creamy chocolates into Alicia's mouth. I knew that she loved them and, on her small salary, could not afford to buy them.

Guggy would look on in utter disgust, not only at my putting chocolates into Alicia's mouth, but at the rate both of us were eating them.

These little episodes, though outwardly they may often have appeared so, were not all arrogance and conceit on my part. I wanted somehow to brighten, or to try to brighten, Alicia's life. I hoped that she might feel, after the cinema, or a gay half-hour at the teashop, that going home to the little room and watching Guggy prepare the supper might not be quite so dreary.

For me, too, it was fun. Instead of watching others about me being important, I could feel important myself and perhaps let Alicia know that life was not made up only of hard work and no play.

One ballerina Alicia worshiped from afar was Lubov Tchernicheva, who bore herself with the dignity of a queen, was the accepted beauty of the company, and just as compelling off stage as when she ruled the boards so imperiously as Zobeide in *Scheherazade*. She was all a child would expect a queen to be. She rarely spoke to anyone, and she seemed to regard the company with something akin to contempt as she glanced at them down her long, finely chiseled nose.

Alicia never dared to speak to Tchernicheva unless the great ballerina first addressed her, and even then she would be almost too awe-inspired to reply. As she so rarely smiled, this majestic figure seemed unhappy, and it disturbed Alicia to think of so great an artiste being so sad at heart. Occasion-

ally, on her way to morning rehearsal, Alicia would ask Guggy to go to the theater by way of the flower market, so that she could buy a bunch of those small French carnations which bloomed so abundantly in the South of France. They were cheap, looked pretty, and their perfume was intoxicating. Timidly the child would take them to Tchernicheva and put them in her hand. A smile would break on that regal face as the ballerina accepted so touching a tribute from the youngest member of the company, and Alicia would be happy for days. She had made Tchernicheva smile, so she was not beyond hope, and maybe her life was not so tragic as the little girl imagined.

Vera Nemtchinova was prima ballerina of the company when Alicia joined it, and her miraculous technique, as well as the sight of those wonderful legs which were insured for a fortune, dazzled the child. She never tired of watching Nemtchinova dancing the pas de deux in *Aurora's Wedding*. It was technical perfection. Vera was everything Alicia wished to be. Only later, when she saw the older ballerinas—Spessiva, Karsavina, and Trefilova—did she realize that to be a great dancer one must have something beyond an exacting technique—there was the even greater question of interpretation to be considered.

As she learned more about the ballet, she began to appreciate and know that the two greatest interpretations she had ever seen were those of Spessiva and Trefilova as Princess Aurora in those *Sleeping Beauty* performances at the Alhambra. They were something far more than mere dancing.

The ballet she most enjoyed watching during her Diaghileff days was *Firebird*, and she still cherishes wonderful mem-

ories of Lopokova, Doubrovaka, and Danilova in the title role. *Petrouchka* never failed to attract her, particularly when Karsavina was appearing as the Dancer; she also tried never to miss a performance of *Le Tricorne*, when Karsavina danced the role of the Miller's Wife in Picasso's enchanting costume.

Alicia may have missed a good deal of her childhood through being a wonder child, but she gained something by always being with older people, and she probably would not have been the great artiste she is today had she not sacrificed the conventional childish pastimes. Through consorting with growups, and being a quiet child by nature, she soon became an excellent listener, and thus acquired knowledge under the most pleasant conditions.

She loved to curl up in a corner and listen to dancers gossiping during those long waits they had in the spring at Monte Carlo, when Diaghileff was staging the new ballets for the coming season. Dancers, of course, rarely talk about anything else apart from dancing and dancers.

Alicia always tingled with excitement when the older members of the company talked about that great ballerina, Mathilde Kchessinska, who had become a fascinating legend in her own lifetime. She was the most fabulous figure in Imperial St. Petersburg, and Alicia could never hear enough about her. She seemed far more wonderful than any of the queens in her history books.

By piecing the various bits of gossip together, Alicia learned that the great Kchessinska had been a close friend of Tsar Nicholas II while he was still Heir Apparent, and was a great power in St. Petersburg, with a magnificent palace



of her own, where she held court like an empress, wearing jewels which had to be seen to be believed. Her diamond dog collar and the ropes of diamonds and pearls which hung in cascades far below her knees were the talk of society in the Tsarist capital. Though she was such a power at court, she still continued to hold her position as prima ballerina at the Maryinsky Theatre.

Karsavina would tell how, for a month before every appearance, Kchessinska would abandon her dazzling social life and live on a frugal diet, staying in bed for twenty-four hours before the performance, without even a drink of water. Thus did she manage to reign in two worlds. When the Tsar ascended the throne, she married the Grand Duke André, but still continued to exercise considerable influence in Imperial quarters.

Kchessinska was a very fine artiste, in spite of her exalted social position. Many had seen her as Esmeralda, her greatest role, in which she appeared on the Imperial stage with a pet goat.

When Isadora Duncan saw her, during a visit to Russia in 1905, she said, "I could not help applauding this fairylike apparition, more like a bird or some charming butterfly than a human."

She was largely instrumental in discovering Nijinsky. During his first vacation at the Imperial School, she chose him as her partner for a series of special performances at Krasnoe Selo, while the Imperial theaters were closed during the summer. Though he was little more than a student, Kchessinska perceived his great potentialities.

When the great ballerina danced with the Diaghileff Ballet

for the first time in 1911, she indulged in a caprice at Covent Garden which must have cost a fortune. She appeared in *Le Lac des Cygnes*, and insisted that Mischa Elman, then the most idolized violinist in the world, play the adagio for her. As he was giving a concert at the Albert Hall that same night, Kchessinska's performance at Covent Garden had to be timed to give him a chance to race across London in a car.

Pavlova, Egorova, Trefilova, and Preobrajenska were all appearing with the Imperial Ballet in St. Petersburg at the same time as Kchessinska, but she has a special place in ballet history because she was the first Russian ballerina to gain supremacy over the Italian stars by performing the thirty-two fouettés made so popular by Legnani. She proved thereby that Russian dancers were every bit as good as imported foreign artistes, and thus helped to lay the foundation stone of Russian Ballet as we know it today.

Little wonder that Alicia listened spellbound when her colleagues discussed this flamboyant queen of the ballet. It never occurred to her, though, that she might one day see this romantic figure—a grand duchess even in her exile and retirement.

When Diaghileff decided that Alicia should dance the adagio from *Le Lac des Cygnes*, with Efimov as her partner, he left her in charge of Grigorieff and Balanchine, who were to teach her. The two authorities could not agree upon the accent to be placed upon certain movements, and Alicia could not help them, since she had neither seen nor danced the ballet. They had a dispute about the lifts. Grigorieff would do them one way; Balanchine would disagree and, picking

up the child, would execute them in a different way. Both maintained they were right, and in the end Alicia was so exhausted that she begged them to demonstrate with a chair while she sat on a costume hamper to regain her breath.

At this point Diaghileff appeared on the scene and decided that there was only one solution—to invite Kchessinska, who happened to be in Monte Carlo, to impart to the Little One her knowledge of the role.<sup>8</sup> Thus Alicia came face to face with the legendary queen of the Maryinsky. She was sweet and charming and had such a tremendous admiration for Alicia's talent when she saw her dance that she spared no pains in passing on to the younger artiste her interpretation of the part.

The dancer's youthful appearance was amazing. She looked like a woman of thirty, but Alicia knew that she must be nearer sixty. It was whispered that massage was the secret. Kchessinska was one of the first dancers to employ a masseur. Massage for the muscles was a new idea in her day and therefore regarded as an eccentricity, or possibly a publicity stunt. Alicia decided that as soon as she had enough money, she would engage a masseur. She kept faith with herself when she could eventually afford it, but was laughed at for years by other dancers, who had no time for such fads.

Alicia was to have yet another glimpse of Kchessinska. The night Diaghileff sent her flowers to mark the first occasion upon which she danced the leading parts in two ballets on the same evening, Alicia caught a chill. The excitement had been too much for her, and she developed double pneumonia, with congestion of the lungs and pleurisy. She was confined to bed for a month, but fortunately at that time her mother

was looking after her in a furnished room in Beau Soleil.

Soon after this misfortune the ballet season came to an end in Monte Carlo, and Diaghileff and his company moved on to Paris, leaving Alicia to follow as soon as she recovered. She felt very miserable and rather sorry for herself as neither she nor her mother knew anyone in Monte Carlo now that everybody had left.

One afternoon someone knocked at the door. Mother and daughter exchanged glances. Who could it be? No one was expected. Mrs. Marks opened the door rather nervously. There on the little landing, having climbed five flights of steep stairs, stood Kchessinska with her arms full of lilies, and behind her was the Grand Duke André with a huge basket of fresh fruit. Kchessinska had seen Diaghileff on the day of his departure for Paris and upon inquiring about the "Little One," had been told that she had been left behind, sick with pneumonia. So the great dancer took the trouble to make a personal call.

Alicia was moved beyond words by such kindness from so great a celebrity, and after Mrs. Marks had bowed their distinguished visitors out, she wept quietly. The visit had a tonic effect on her, and she convalesced in record time, and was soon able to rejoin the company. She was even ready to dance two ballets a night if Sergypop would take the risk.

Guggy began to complain about not feeling well. She felt dizzy frequently, and heights had a particularly distressing effect on her. She couldn't sit in the gallery of a theater or look at the sea from the edge of a cliff. But she never wavered

in her duty, and still insisted that Alicia do nothing in life but dance.

Alicia was now quite a widely traveled young girl of fifteen, but as helpless as an infant, being compelled to rely upon Guggy for everything and incurring the severest displeasure if she attempted to stand on her own feet.

One day Guggy felt so ill that she was forced to send for the doctor, who gave her strict orders to remain in bed, as her condition was far worse than she suspected.

That night Alicia was dancing Papillon in *Carnaval*, and as soon as she realized that Guggy would be unable to accompany her to the theater, she felt sick with panic. She could not go on; she could not dress herself at the theater or make up her face, so she would have to explain to Grigorieff, the régisseur, that she could not dance again until Guggy was better. Guggy knew only too well what was happening in the child's mind, so she took the matter in hand to the best of her ability.

Under her directions Alicia packed a suitcase with the make-up and the other paraphernalia required at the theater. Then she set out, with instructions to go straight to Lydia Sokolova's dressing room and seek her help. Sokolova had been with the Diaghileff company for fourteen years. As she was British, and a senior member of the company, Guggy knew that she would look after the child and see that she was properly dressed for the stage.

Alicia was desperately unhappy as she made her way to the theater. She hated leaving poor Guggy all alone, and wished she could stay with her. She dreaded the prospect of

getting ready for the performance. She would never be able to apply the grease paint or arrange the bunch of Victorian curls which had to be pinned in to match her own hair.

As soon as she arrived at the theater, she reported to Sokolova, who expressed her sorrow about Guggy and willingly consented to supervise Alicia's make-up, sending her back to her own room to fetch her grease paint. When she came back to Sokolova's dressing room, she placed her make-up box on the table and sat down with an upturned face, ready to be made up by the great dancer. Sokolova could hardly believe her own eyes. She asked her to pick out the fleshing, but Alicia did not know what she was talking about. Later the elder woman was to learn that this would-be ballerina was quite incapable of applying a stage make-up, arranging her hair, or even tying her ballet slippers.

It was too much for Sokolova.

"Do you realize, my girl," she reproached her, "that you are a member of the greatest ballet company in the world, with whom you have been dancing for more than a year, and yet you are quite incapable of getting yourself ready for the stage? You should be ashamed of yourself. I hate to have to admit that you come from my country. It is almost worse than not being able to read or write. How can you claim to be a dancer when you cannot even dress yourself in a dancer's working clothes?"

By this time Alicia was in tears, and the make-up which she had applied under Sokolova's direction was ruined. They had to start all over again. Sokolova adjusted the false curls, and then knelt down to tie the pink satin ribbons of her ballet slippers. Anxious to get ahead with her own preparation for

the stage, she dismissed Alicia with a curt wave of the hand, saying, "Now go and dance—if you can manage to do that without any help!"

It was a stinging remark, but Alicia knew that she had deserved it. It was a disgrace to be a solo dancer and yet be so ignorant of every aspect of her art beyond a mastery of the steps.

After the performance that night Alicia went back to her own dressing room and managed to struggle into her street clothes without assistance. She felt more than grateful to Sokolova for having made her performance possible. She knew she could not have appeared at all without her help, so she knocked on the great dancer's dressing-room door to thank her for all she had done.

Sokolova was no longer angry.

"Don't thank me," she smiled at the embarrassed little figure in the doorway, "but promise me that as long as you live you will never allow anyone to make up your face or put on your ballet slippers."

Her large eyes full of gratitude, Alicia promised. On her way home she realized that she must follow Sokolova's advice if she hoped to make any headway in her profession. She must be independent. She might not be able to clean a house or cook a meal—other people could do those things for her, if she could earn the money to pay them—but she must become self-sufficient. From the time she entered the stage door until the time she left the theater after the performance she must be her own mistress, able to cope with all the demands of a role. She would apply her own make-up and tie her own slippers, even when Guggy came back.

Poor Guggy never came back. She never went to the theater with Alicia again. Soon after that historic performance of *Carnaval* the Monte Carlo season came to an end, and the company moved on to Paris. By that time Guggy was worse, and there seemed little chance of recovery. Alicia stayed behind with her, promising Sergypop to follow as soon as Guggy was well enough to travel, little knowing that their days together were numbered.

Diaghileff realized what was happening and could see something had to be done to rescue the child, so he sent her a telegram from Paris: "Unless you rejoin the company within two days, consider yourself dismissed."

Immediate action was essential, or Alicia's entire career stood in jeopardy. Her mother made arrangements to have Guggy transferred to a public institution, where, later, having lost her reason, she died.

Alicia, having satisfied herself that her old governess was being properly cared for, sorrowfully packed her small belongings, including the hatbox Kitchen, and boarded the train for Paris. She was breathing with a freedom she had never known.

She liked the taste of it; it gave her a courage as strange as it was exhilarating. She realized that she had a mind and a will of her own, and she felt that within limits she was quite capable of looking after herself, both in and out of the theater.

The buzz of life at the Gare du Lyon held no fears for Alicia. With the aid of a friendly taxi driver, she found her way to the rehearsal room, where she imagined the company would be rehearsing. Grigorieff was speechless with surprise



when he saw the little English girl walking in with a suitcase in one hand and her Kitchen in the other. When Mrs. Marks arrived in Paris a day or two later she found a much-changed daughter, capable of fending for herself and quite enjoying the struggle of making her way to the top. The child was happier than she had ever seen her.

From that time onward, Mrs. Marks took Guggy's place, becoming Alicia's constant companion, but never a tyrant as the well-meaning Guggy had been.

They never went back to the old room in Monte Carlo when the company were in residence in the South. They moved into furnished rooms in Beau Soleil, which meant that Mrs. Marks could cook at home and save a considerable amount on restaurant meals. On tour they stayed in modest hotels and pensions, traveling second-class on the train, and sitting up all night on the long journeys, as the company, except for a few privileged artistes, were not provided with sleepers.

Alicia was very much happier, and Mrs. Marks was less agitated about things at home, since through the kindness of her friends the other girls could be sent to school.

Alicia traveled through most of western Europe with the Diaghileff Ballet, which gave six London seasons while she was with them—two at the Coliseum, and the others at the Lyceum, Prince's, His Majesty's, and Covent Garden.

In the summer of 1929 this unique company of dancers sang what proved to be their swan song.

I had rejoined the company for that last season, when the leading dancers were Karsavina, as a guest artiste in *Petrouchka*, Olga Spessiva, Alexandra Danilova, Lydia Soko-

lova, Selia Doubrovskaya, Serge Lifar, and Leon Woizikowsky. It marked the first occasion upon which Alicia danced on the boards of London's celebrated Opera House, where the Diaghileff company had made their debut at Edward VII's Coronation Gala in 1911.

It also marked the first occasion upon which Alicia and I danced as partners in public, in the Blue Bird pas de deux in *Aurora's Wedding*. Furthermore, it marked the first occasion upon which Diaghileff admitted to Alicia that she might emerge as a ballerina of his distinguished company. She was eighteen, and he was satisfied that the four and a half years' training she had received under his guidance and the rigid discipline of Legat, Cecchetti, Balanchine, and Egorova had equipped her to interpret leading roles. She was now in a position to hold her own with the other ballerinas in the company. The great man considered that the little English girl had won her laurels. He had not been mistaken when he spotted her at Astafieva's.

Diaghileff broke this wonderful news to Alicia to the barbaric strains of the Polovtsian Dances from Borodin's *Prince Igor*. It was the last matinee performance of the season at Covent Garden. Alicia danced in the second ballet of the afternoon, and Diaghileff signified that he would like to talk to her during the performance of *Prince Igor*, which rounded off the afternoon and in which she was not appearing.

"Go and change your costume and then come back to me on the stage," he said.

She hurried off obediently. Diaghileff wished to speak to her. What had she done? Her heart was still pounding from

her performance, but she hurried up the stairs and tore off her costume.

The music of *Prince Igor* thundered in her ears as she ran downstairs again and made her way apprehensively to the great man standing in the wings. He looked troubled and tired; the huge shoulders drooped unfamiliarly. In the green light of the reflectors his paleness seemed deathlike and his eyes gazed wandringly above and beyond the twirling dancers. A dryness came into Alicia's throat at the sight of him. If only he would rest, obey the doctors, follow his diet . . .

He turned and looked down at her. She was so tiny, so frail beside him, that he took her hand in his with infinite care and tenderness.

"Alicia, my dear"—his voice came as if from a distance through the roar of the orchestra—"until now you have worked for me. Next season you will work for yourself."

A foreboding chill shot through her, and she could feel the beads of perspiration turn to ice on her burning forehead. "Work for myself?" she stammered. "You mean . . ."

"I mean that while you were learning your job, you were earning a corps de ballet salary. Next season you will be a ballerina and will command a ballerina's salary."

He held her hand as they walked back and forth in the darkened passage between the wall and backdrop, the music rising to a crescendo.

"I have great plans for you, Alicia. In a few days I go to Germany, to see Hindemith about the score of a new ballet Lifar is to create for you."

A sigh escaped the slender figure walking by his side, and the tears that had welled in her eyes sparkled with wonder as he went on:

"You shall also dance in *Lac des Cygnes*, in *Les Biches*, in *Romeo and Juliet*, in *The Firebird*—but best of all"—he paused, as though to prepare her for a momentous announcement. Her hand was trembling so that he put his arm around her shoulders and pressed them encouragingly—"best of all, you will dance—Giselle."

"Giselle?" Had she heard correctly? "Giselle? I?"

"Yes, you. You will alternate with Spessiva. Pat will be your Albrecht. You have borne your long period of training with patience and diligence. Now you shall reap your reward. And have no fear. You are worthy of any role I choose to give you—even Giselle!"

The orchestra ended on an ear-splitting clash of cymbals.

"Even Giselle!" Alicia murmured in the sudden silence. All the frugal years of hard work and privation were behind her.

Diaghileff removed his arm from her shoulders. Her knees were weak from emotion. She was to dance Giselle! Alternate with the great Spessiva!

It had been a grim four and a half years, but Diaghileff's news made every moment of them seem worth while. Apart from the financial aspect, it was wonderful to be accepted by a Russian company as "one of them." Nijinska had once said to her, "You have a Russian soul!" Diaghileff seemed to agree, and she was more than proud to consider herself a ballerina in a company which included the divine Olga

Spessiva—every young dancer's dream of a classical ballerina.

As soon as the Covent Garden season was over, Alicia felt she had earned a holiday. She was anxious to celebrate her good fortune, and felt the necessity of a real rest before starting the arduous work of the winter season, when it was essential that she carry off her laboriously won roles to the best possible advantage. She went down to the South coast to stay with some friends who had a house just outside Worthing, wandered about the garden, and went for walks on the Downs. It was a glorious spell of carefree relaxation, without any prearranged plan, and she enjoyed the luxury of surrendering herself to her own moods and doing only what took her fancy.

A newsboy used to deliver the evening paper just before dinner. He was in the habit of leaving it under a laurel bush at the garden gate, and Alicia enjoyed going to collect it, to see what was happening in the outside world. As she shook the paper open that evening of August nineteenth she was horrified to read—SERGE DIAGHILEFF DEAD. She felt as if she had suddenly been plunged into a ghastly nightmare. It was something she had experienced only once before—when they had told her of her own father dying just as unexpectedly.

All the company knew that Diaghileff had been far from well, but none suspected the end was so near. Alicia crawled to a garden chair and fell into it, trying to summon up sufficient courage to read on. After the London season, Diaghileff had gone to his favorite Venice, where he was joined by Lifar and Boris Kochno. He was in excellent health for a day or two, but suddenly ran a very high temperature and finally sank into a coma and died. He was only fifty-seven. His great

friend, Madame Sert, joined Lifar and Kochno in their watch throughout the last night and together they saw his breathing cease about the time dawn broke. As a fortuneteller had once prophesied, he met his death by the sea. He was eventually taken by gondola to his final resting place under the cypress trees on the island of San Michele.

There was no sleep for Alicia that night. She had lost the greatest friend she had ever known and one who had done more for her career than anyone else. She did not seem particularly disappointed about losing the opportunity to dance Giselle, Odette, and the other great roles he had promised her. Nothing mattered any more. The company and all it stood for was perfection. She could never hope to see its like again, and in the ensuing twenty years she never has!

She thought of his genius for putting the finest talents together and getting them to flower in unison. He fed his company from the outside, preferring to take dancers into his ensemble when they were already fully fledged. He had no time for companies which recruited only dancers from their own school and closed the door on outsiders. Alicia remembered how he had taken Danilova, Gevergeva, Balanchine, and Efimov after they had danced at the Empire Music Hall in London, and how he had taken her after catching little more than a glimpse of her at Astafieva's.

The future did not bear thinking about. She no longer wished to dance without his inspiration and outside the ideal setting he created for his artistes.

Alicia's first instinct was to go home to her mother. Mrs. Marks could do little or nothing to dispel the effects of the shock, but it was a comfort to be near her who had been so

close to the Diaghileff company for so long and knew the real Sergypop!

That the Diaghileff Ballet was a thing of the past was a thought too terrible for contemplation. The grim truth was all too obvious from a simple letter which Alicia received from Grigorieff about a month later:

DIRECTION

Des  
BALLETS RUSSES  
de  
SERGE de DIAGHILEFF.

16 Bd. d'Italie,  
Monte Carlo.  
Sept. 14th, 1929.

Dear Alicia,

I must inform you that I have received a letter from the judicial administrator of Serge de Diaghileff's successors, in which he declares that Serge de Diaghileff's enterprise has come to an end and begs me to inform all the "artistes" of the company about it.

This decision is taken by him with the consent of the successors of Serge de Diaghileff.

Yours sincerely,  
SERGE GRIGORIEFF.

That was the last word. There was nothing more to be said.





## CHAPTER FIVE

# BRITISH BALLET



FOR some months after Diaghileff's death Alicia had not the heart nor indeed the opportunity to dance again. The West End musical successes of the early 1930s—*The Cat and the Fiddle*, *The Dubarry*, *Frederika*, *The Land of Smiles*, *White Horse Inn*, *Wonder Bar*, and *Viktoria and Her Hussar*—did not stage the lavish dance sequences as did *Oklahoma*, *Brigadoon*, or *Kiss Me Kate* later. Ballet dancers were not in such universal demand as they are today. Nor were there any major ballet companies in existence, once the Diaghileff troupe had ceased to exist. Apart from the Pavlova Company, there was practically nothing, and Pavlova could not hope to offer artistes the same scope as Diaghileff, even though she invited certain members of his company to join her.

A bleak outlook faced Alicia when her career was abruptly halted by Serge Pavlovich's tragic death. A great gap was left

in the artistic life of many dancers, but for Alicia it was even more desperate. She had not really been established as a ballerina, and her qualities as a dancer were, because of their rareness, more likely to prove a hindrance than a blessing. Here was a potential prima ballerina, the first that England had given to the world, matured and educated by Diaghileff, and also a classic dancer of such delicacy that any false movement might ruin her forever. At that time her beauty had not bloomed to its present fullness, but this may have been a blessing in disguise because she was not called upon to resist the temptation of being lured by commercial managements into revues or musical comedies.

On several occasions I wanted to have Alicia as my partner when I was engaged by Sir Oswald Stoll at the London Coliseum or in the revues in which I appeared for André Charlot and Jack Buchanan. I was always given the same answer, "She is not pretty enough." Today they would think very differently.

Alicia had some bitter and discouraging years before she saw her name in top-line lights outside a theater presenting a popular commercial success.

Her homecoming after Diaghileff's death must have been somewhat humiliating. After dancing solo parts with the foremost ballet company on earth, in half the capitals of Europe, she found herself back in London in the bosom of her family and, as far as the impresarios were concerned, practically unknown, unsung, and unwanted. Her activities were frustrated and all but paralyzed through lack of money. The financial position at home had hardly improved, making her situation far from enviable. Her mother behaved magni-

ficiently and steered Alicia through the shallows for the best part of four years, always managing to keep her clear of despair.

Her daughter's return must have been a bitter disappointment to her, though she never gave any clue as to her real feelings. Alicia could not help returning home. She came back through no fault of her own, and it was obviously the one-and-only course to take. All the same, Mrs. Marks must have been worried to see Alicia, now a young woman of nineteen, wandering about the house with no prospect of an engagement in view. She, upon whom all the hard-gained money had been spent, and who had hoped to keep the family, now seemed in a worse plight than ever. To be on the brink of being launched as a ballerina was useless in a world where ballet was practically in a state of total eclipse. Yet it would have been sacrilege to turn her hand to anything else.

Alicia's mother was a wonderful woman. Believing we live in the best of all possible worlds, she was willing to wait and see what turned up for her daughter. Heaven alone knew how they would manage to live, but they would face the emergencies as they arose day by day. She was just the right companion for Alicia at this point in her career. She met every situation with a quiet, gentle smile and assured the girl that the course of events was always for the best. What appeared to be a catastrophe today often turned out to be a blessing in disguise tomorrow. She had tremendous faith in the fact that something good would soon happen, and she never had any regrets for the decisions they had made in the past.

When I saw Mady Christians in the play *I Remember*

*Mama*, I thought of Eileen Marks, who never let her daughters know just how poor they were. By some minor miracle she would always manage to muster up enough money for a taxi if one of them happened to be going out to a function held too late to return home by bus or subway.

When her father died, Alicia realized for the first time in her life that money did not grow on trees. Life was even more difficult now as, having been a soloist with the Diaghileff Ballet, she had a certain position to maintain. She felt she could not make the round of theatrical agents, looking for work. She had to behave like a dignified ballerina, sitting at home until people approached her. The telephone never rang, the postman never called with a letter containing an offer of an engagement. She was in the curious position of being a foreigner in her own country.

In the Diaghileff Ballet she had taken a Russian name to fulfil the plan the greast impresario had in mind. He wanted her to become an international artiste, rather than one associated with any particular country, and so, on her return to London, she appeared to belong to no country at all. The Russian Ballet no longer existed to claim her, and the dancers in her own country showed little desire to recognize her.

It is significant that when the Camargo Society was formed in October 1930 to try to keep ballet alive by a series of Sunday performances, Alicia was the only British dancer of any standing not asked to take part at the opening performance. It hurt her at a time when she felt that she might, with her international experience, be of some service to British ballet.

She was, however, invited to create a leading role, a month or two later, when they presented Ninette de Valois' ballet

*Cephalus and Procris*, to music by Gréty, with décor by William Chappell. It was an impressive occasion, two days after the death of Pavlova. The audience stood in silent homage while the orchestra played *The Dying Swan*. The stage was empty, save for a pool of light. Later Alicia was to create the Polka in Frederick Ashton's *Façade* for the Camargo Society, as well as the Creole Girl in his *Rio Grande* and the heroine of his *Lord of Burleigh*, but she had difficulties still to overcome.

When it is beneath an artiste's professional dignity to solicit theatrical agents for work, she ought to be able to bring herself to their notice in some other way. She ought to be able to lunch or dine at fashionable restaurants patronized by the stars and the powers-that-be in the theatrical firmament. Alicia's finances did not permit even an annual visit to these expensive establishments. Teashops were nearer her mark, and those had to be avoided if it was possible to get home for a meal and thereby save a shilling.

There were a good many shows running in London that attracted her. She was quite content to sit in the gallery, or to buy a seat in the pit, but her friends advised her against it. They pointed out that familiarity bred contempt and it was not proper for a galleryite to find herself sitting next to the dancer he or she had applauded in *The Nightingale* or *Carnaval* only a few months ago. She must never lose her essential mystery. So Alicia could go to the theater only when she was taken.

Mrs. Haskell understood how the girl felt about such matters and used to take her to shows worth seeing. Ninette de Valois often met Alicia, when they would talk at length

about the time they had spent together in the Diaghileff Ballet and the occasion when Ninette guided her across France on that historic trip to Monte Carlo. Ninette always called her Alice—and still does!

Ninette asked Alicia on one occasion if she would care to have dinner with her and then go on to a film which she had expressed a desire to see. The idea attracted her, but realizing that she would never be able to reciprocate, she refused, saying that she had to go home to carry out some essential domestic duties. Ninette repeated her invitation a few days later, and received the same reply; after asking Alicia on six different occasions, she realized that another line of action would have to be taken.

"Do you realize, Alice," she asked, "that I am inviting you as my guest? I want you to spend the evening with me, and I want you to know that you are under no obligation to entertain me at a later date. Surely we can go out and enjoy ourselves—just for old times' sake—without worrying about social conventions as far as expenses are concerned."

Alicia admitted that she had refused because the cost of dinner in Soho and seeing a film in the West End was beyond her purse. When an understanding was reached, Alicia was Ninette's guest once a week. It was good to be with someone who understood, someone who did not despise her lack of funds, and someone who had known the excitement of working in the Diaghileff Ballet.

These happy meetings helped to keep despair at bay during the long period of waiting, just as did the crazes which took place under the Marks roof.

Realizing it was bad for a girl to moon about the house

doing nothing, Mrs. Marks encouraged Alicia to take an interest in some sort of a pastime. Alicia took up each suggestion with such zest that it became known in the family as a craze.

Each craze had something of a practical nature. The first was dressmaking. Alicia's mother pointed out that she should always be smartly and simply turned out, and as there was no money to commission models from a fashion house, she thought it would be a good idea if Alicia made her own clothes. There was a sewing machine at home, and Alicia's imagination was stirred by her mother supplying her with a *Vogue* pattern book. After making a few rough sketches on paper, Alicia was able to translate her ideas into terms of material, and soon ran up a much-admired summer frock, as well as a couple of black dresses for more formal occasions.

At the same time she learned how to make stage costumes, and, given the requisite number of yards of tarlatan, she could produce a *Sylphide* dress which looked a mass of foaming loveliness on the stage. She even tried her hand at making a *tutu*, the short ballet dress, which is far more difficult to execute, as the balance has to be perfect or the entire costume looks hideous.

Cooking was the second craze during what can be called the doldrums of Alicia's career. Eating in restaurants was out of the question, so her mother tried to interest Alicia in the kitchen.

Cake-making appealed to Alicia more than the roasts and stews. As her mother's birthday was on September 14, Alicia thought she would like to try her hand at a birthday cake to honor the occasion. The main difficulty lay, not in making

the cake, but in preparing it in secret, as half the fun was to surprise her mother. As the cake had to be made in three distinct stages, the girls were ordered to get their mother out of the house on three different days of the same week.

On the first day Alicia did the baking while her sisters took their mother to see the autumn glory of Hyde Park. She must have been puzzled by their sudden interest in nature, but she enjoyed the walk and made no comment. Meantime, Alicia stored the cake in the bottom of her wardrobe, where there was no occasion for her mother to go. There was a smell of baking about the place when the nature lovers returned from their walk, but Alicia accounted for that by producing some hot rock cakes for tea.

Two days later Doris announced that she had seen some cheap shoes in a store which was the better part of an hour away by bus. This gave Alicia a chance to make the almond paste and to spread it neatly over the cake. The following day Alicia asked a relative to invite her mother to tea and in her absence she coated the cake with sugar icing and decorated it with a colored inscription, all in her favorite shade of mauve.

The masterpiece came as a complete surprise to her mother.

Knitting was the final craze to obsess Alicia. That led to an inspiration which had an effect upon the entire ballet world.

One day she was knitting a bed jacket, which was to be a Christmas present for an old friend of the family, and so that the finished garment would be warm, and at the same time as light as a feather, she did a lacelike stitch on thick wooden needles. Suddenly the idea occurred to her that practice tights would be ideal if knitted in the same manner. She wanted a pair herself but could not afford to buy them, and anyway,



the ready-made ones were always too thick for her liking: they caused her to perspire and lose weight. So she knitted herself a pair of mauve practice tights. They gave her legs freedom, and as the openwork pattern permitted the body to breathe, there was no question of losing weight.

Immediately other dancers copied her idea, and now net-work practice tights are quite a common sight at rehearsal and in class. They are something that Markova gave to the ballet, just as Camargo introduced the shorter ballet skirt.

With these crazes and her mother's optimism life was not entirely unbearable for Alicia. She had very little time for brooding, even though she had no work. She had to keep in trim, of course, to be ready for any work that might show itself. There was not enough money to attend a regular class, so Alicia used to work alone at home, using the towel rail in the bathroom for her barre exercises. When funds permitted, she would have an occasional private lesson with Astafieva, feeling that she would derive far more benefit from occasional individual instruction than regular tuition in a class of twenty or thirty other pupils.

As Alicia was so rarely seen in class, a legend grew up—which persists even to this day—that she never works. Some people think that she is lazy and refuses to work, while others imagine her to be one of those lucky people who can perform miracles on the ballet stage without effort. Both theories are equally ridiculous. Alicia has devoted her entire life to her art, and the fact that she chooses to practice alone rather than in the company of others does not mean that she is either lazy or a dancer who need not exercise.

In the spring following Diaghileff's death, a glimmer of

hope came from Monte Carlo. The Syndicate des Bains de Mer of Monte Carlo offered Grigorieff a contract to arrange the opera ballets for them. As he was to engage the dancers himself, he wrote to a number of former Diaghileff artistes who were idling away their time in various parts of Europe. Some responded to his suggestion and made their way back to the old headquarters.

Alicia also received an invitation from Grigorieff, and her mother lost no time in making arrangements for her to accept it. Together they left for the South of France, full of high hopes. When they arrived, they met some old friends—Danilova, who was more mischievous than ever, Lubov Tchernicheva, more imperious than ever, Ludmilla Schollar, and Anatol Vilzak.

They did their best, but the old magic was no longer in the air, and the place, despite its beauty, was charged with too many sad memories for all of them. After two months the group broke up, and the artistes sorrowfully returned to their individual wanderings. If the ballet was to be born again, obviously it was not to be at Monte Carlo.

Mrs. Marks and her daughter returned to London. Alicia was far from well. Apart from the disappointment, the emotional contact with Monte Carlo had been rather too much for her, reminding her of days when it seemed just a question of time before she reigned as a Diaghileff ballerina. Now all was bleak and hopeless again. Mrs. Marks scraped a few pounds together in her miraculous fashion and sent Alicia away for a quiet holiday, to some friends on the South coast. The air did her good. She looked better when she returned but she was in a sad way mentally.

Alicia received a letter one morning that gave her cause to forget her own sad feelings and rejoice. It was from a young man named Frederick Ashton, of whom she had heard but never met. Educated in Peru, he had studied ballet under Massine, Marie Rambert, and Nijinska. Now, after touring Europe with Ida Rubenstein, and dancing in London with Karsavina, he found himself at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, arraigning a ballet for a revival of Dryden's *Marriage à la Mode*, which was being produced by Sir Nigel Playfair, with Angela Baddeley, Athene Seyler, Adele Dixon, Glen Byam Shaw, Anthony Ireland, and George Hayes in the cast, and he wondered if Alicia would be interested in the suggestion that they should dance together in his little ballet.

Not only was she interested, but the fact that he had remembered her made her smile with happiness and enthusiasm as she promptly made her way to Hammersmith and accepted the engagement.

Once the ink was dry on the contract, and Alicia felt more certain of her ground, she turned to Ashton and asked, "Why did you think of me for this ballet?"

He was quite honest in his reply.

"Because I saw you dance on many occasions during the Diaghileff season at the Prince's Theatre," he said. "Night after night I sat up in the gallery marveling at the grace and precision of your work. I knew that you would sooner or later make your name. I was attracted by something else as well—your amazing likeness to Pavlova. I have always worshiped her, and there were moments when you looked so like her on the stage that I used to gaze at you open-mouthed. When Sir Nigel gave me leave to choose my own dancers, I

immediately thought of you, hardly daring to hope that you would accept so humble an engagement after the Diaghileff Ballet. But here you are, and I hope we are going to enjoy a long and happy association."

Alicia's morale had not received such a bolstering for twelve weary months, and she threw herself into the part with boundless enthusiasm.

Only a small area of the stage was used by the dancers, which meant that they had very little scope in the production. They were not much more than a touch of local color, and could hardly hope for much attention from critics or playgoers. Alicia was given a hideous Nell Gwynne wig which almost buried her face. After the first night she discarded it in favor of a bunch of becoming black curls, and then she asked Ashton if she might do something about her dress. It was probably historically correct, but it was far too long to make an effective costume for his dances. He agreed that it might be shortened as long as nothing was said to the management.

Alicia, thanks to the sewing craze, was now an expert needlewoman, and lost no time in turning up the dress a good eight inches so that the audience could see something of her legs. Freddie laughed at her, and said she was only doing the same thing that Camargo had done two hundred years before her. He understood her feelings as a dancer, but begged her to endure the discomforts and limitations of the situation, as he felt sure that it would lead to far better engagements in the future. To Alicia it was like starting all over again, but she liked and had faith in this young man who so obviously had faith in her.

She was soon to discover that the day she met Freddie Ashton was one of the luckiest of her career.

Frederick Ashton was present at the very birth of British Ballet. When the Marie Rambert Dancers gave their first season at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, about eight months before the production of *Matriage à la Mode*, his *Capriol Suite* was one of the most enchanting works they performed. So it was only to be expected that when the Ballet Club came into being through the instigation of Marie Rambert in 1931, young Ashton became one of the pillars of the organization.

The Ballet Club made their headquarters in a church hall, which has since become the miniature Mercury Theatre, and was directed by Ashley Dukes, husband of Marie Rambert.

The Ballet Club set out to give Sunday-night performances, being the first organization to enter the field of British Ballet as such, and to try to gather together such fragments of Diaghileff's tradition as could be welded together by British dancers to form the basis of a British tradition. Mme. Rambert's school was used as a recruiting ground for new young dancers who were brave enough to retain their English names, and new choreographers—Frederick Ashton, Susan Salaman, Andrée Howard, Antony Tudor—were encouraged to enlarge the repertoire.

Alicia was invited by Ashton to be a guest artiste at the opening night of the Ballet Club on February 16, 1931, when he created a new ballet, *La Peri*, especially for the occasion. To music by Dukas she danced the title role, while Ashton danced the hero, Iskender.

Alicia was naturally flattered by the compliment of having

a ballet especially created for her, the first in England, and when she began to work with this young choreographer she realized that he had made a profound study of her work, so that he knew both her qualities and her limitations. In *La Peri* the drama was interpreted by the light movement of the female figure in strong contrast to the heavily mimed role of the male.

At that time London was under the spell of the Persian Exhibition at Burlington House, and, struck by the oriental contour of Alicia's features, Ashton was anxious to create a ballet with an Eastern flavor. Having chosen the music by Dukas—music which had previously inspired Pavlova to impersonate the girl who holds the flower of immortality—both Alicia and Freddie listened to the score being played over and over again. As soon as their minds were imbued with the music, they worked on the stage together, and slowly the ballet took shape, with six attendant girls, including Pearl Argyle, Maude Lloyd, and Andrée Howard.

The première was a decided success in its small way, and from then on the Ballet Club became a popular rendezvous on Sunday nights. Lady Oxford (Margot Asquith) and her son, Anthony, were invariably to be seen there, as well as a number of famous stage personalities who enjoyed the ballet, among them Sir Charles Cochran, Harriet Hocter, Madge Elliott, and Cyril Ritchard. Often they would stay after the performance to join the artistes for coffee and sandwiches in the adjoining studio where the classes and rehearsals were held, and there was a sense of excitement in the air during the discussions between experienced ballet goers and this

group of talented artistes, many on the brink of what have since proved brilliant careers.

Alicia continued to appear on Sunday nights at the Ballet Club for four years, dancing there for the first time the leading roles in *Aurora's Wedding* and *Les Sylphides*, and creating a whole series of new ballets by Ashton, Antony Tudor, and Ninette de Valois. Later guest artistes at the Ballet Club included Kyra Nijinska, daughter of the famous dancer, Margot Fonteyn, June Brae, Robert Helpmann, and Agnes de Mille.

There was no financial reward for dancing at the Ballet Club. Alicia received half a guinea for each performance, which meant that not a penny went into her purse. She had to buy a pair of ballet slippers for each occasion, at a cost of six shillings, and as she left so late, she had to take a taxi home. With a tip, the fare amounted to four shillings sixpence, which meant that there was nothing left of the half guinea. But it was worth it, to be happily at work again.

"Dancing on that postage-stamp stage at the Ballet Club was a strange experience," Alicia recalls, "after the vast stages of La Scala, Milan, and the London Coliseum, where I had danced with the Diaghileff Ballet. We had been trained to appear on large stages, so my engagements at the Ballet Club gave me the excellent opportunity of reducing my work to a much smaller canvas, for it was more like appearing in a cabaret than in a theater.

"Dancing under such intimate conditions, where one could shake hands with friends in the front row, taught me one vital lesson: all the strain and effort of dancing had to be con-

cealed, or the illusion would be ruined. Panting and perspiration were out of the question, so I had to learn to give an impression of effortless ease and never allow my breathing to be visible from the front.

"My experience stood me in very good stead a year or two later when I danced *Giselle* for the first time. No such human function as breathing must be evident in the second act, when *Giselle* is a disembodied spirit, no longer subject to the laws of the flesh.

"I was glad that Mother had encouraged my dressmaking phase because we were expected to make our own costumes at the Ballet Club. William Chappell produced the designs for most ballets, and we made them up from whatever materials we were lucky enough to find. Marie Rambert would often give us her castoff evening dresses to convert into ballet costumes, a black velvet model being cut up to make a tunic for Freddie Ashton when he appeared in *Lac des Cygnes*. Pearl Argyle was the expert dressmaker of the company, often spending an entire day in the sewing room, finally emerging with the most glittering costume for Princess Aurora. I spent many hours snipping and gathering yard after yard of tulle to make myself a tutu, a wearisome occupation. Often Freddie Ashton would keep me company, discussing details of the next production.

"To have come into contact with Freddie was a stroke of good fortune for me. Like Massine at a later date, he gave me a wide variety of roles which other choreographers would never have thought of offering me. He refused to cast me to type, and in those ballets which he devised for me at the Ballet Club, and for Sunday-night performances of the *Camargo*



Society, he gave me a chance of proving that I had a sense of humor.

"No one else would have dared to give me the Polka in *Façade*, or permitted me to take over the Tango and the Tarantella from Lopokova in the same ballet when the Camargo Society gave their season at the Savoy Theatre in 1932. He also cast me for the sultry Creole girl in *Rio Grande*, the Tennysonian heroine of *The Lord of Burleigh*, and the Degas ballerina in *Foyer de Danse*. Then by way of complete contrast he gave me the role of Marguerite in *Mephisto Valse*, the *Faust* ballet he mounted on Liszt music with Sophie Fedorovich's gray and scarlet setting.

"Freddie had confidence in me as a dancer, and I realized that he gave me the fullest possible opportunity to express myself. Never had I experienced such a glorious feeling of artistic satisfaction. Every ballet he conceived gave me a chance of attempting to conquer a new world. For some time we worked hand in glove. Whenever he was asked to provide a new ballet, he suggested that it should be mounted on me, and on occasions when I was invited to dance, I suggested that he should arrange the ballet for me. Through him I was later able to supplement the family income by accepting engagements in cine-variety and in musical comedy."

During Alicia's appearance at the Ballet Club, I remember receiving a most enthusiastic letter from my mother, who had been to see her as La Goulue, the cancan star of *Bar Aux Folies Bergère*, the ballet inspired by Manet's famous picture, and mounted by Ninette de Valois on Chabrier's music. Mother wrote: "You just won't know Alicia when you see her. She has developed an extraordinary sense of humor, like

a singer who has suddenly given evidence of feeling in her voice. Her roguish impertinence as the coquettish star of the cancan girls is a superb piece of effrontery, which makes the audience rock with laughter. Our little Alicia is finding herself at last."

Her friend and critic, Arnold Haskell, paid tribute to her in a 1931 copy of *Dancing Times*, saying, "Not yet twenty-one years of age, she is in the happy position of having both experience and youth at an age when many are only commencing their careers. . . . After Diaghileff she was termed *colorless* and *lacking in personality* by some, but she found herself in Camargo Society and Ballet Club productions. She proved that she is capable of extremely subtle shades of comedy and burlesque in the movements of her body."

Nor was Alicia neglecting her devotion to the classics, for on the opening night of her third season at the Ballet Club, when she danced in *Lac des Cygnes*, the *Dancing Times'* critic wrote: "Alicia Markova on this occasion surpassed everything she has ever done before. The poise of her body, the beautiful lines of her arabesque, and the clean footwork all combined to produce an effect which those who saw her will not forget for a long time."

Nor did I forget for a long time the shock I received when I saw Alicia in *Rio Grande*. As a ballet, I hated it, but when I look back and realize what she did, it was a revelation. The ballet was crude in its subject matter—sailors and their clandestine relations with the girls, of whom Alicia was the youngest and the one with the eye for the best-looking sailor. This was no Alicia of the classic tutu, but an olive-skinned

wench. Here, at last, were the signs of development for which I had been waiting so long. Until then I had regarded her as a phenomenal classical ballerina—cold and unexciting. In *Rio Grande* she was no classical ballerina, for the choreography was not on toe and did not call for ballet dancing. Katherine Dunham in her most provocative mood could never have given it more glamour and sex appeal than Alicia, or even technically approached it as she did. Alicia as a professional charmer certainly made me sit up and think. For the first time I had seen her assume a character of importance outside that of a dancer.

After presenting a series of Sunday-night performances the Camargo Society wound up their short span of life in a blaze of glory, giving a season of ballet at the Savoy Theatre in 1932, with Olga Spessiva and Lydia Lopokova as guest stars, eclipsing this achievement the following June with two gala performances at Covent Garden.

Attended by Queen Mary and the Duke and Duchess of York (George VI and Queen Elizabeth), the program consisted of a performance of *Coppélia* with Lopokova and the second act of *Lac des Cygnes* with Alicia as Odette, Stanley Judson as Benno, and myself as Siegfried. The entire evening was devised as entertainment for the delegates of the Economic Conference which was being held in London at that time.

Alicia was naturally delighted on hearing that Queen Mary was to be present, but on that account felt something should be done about her tutu. A gala occasion in the presence of Her Majesty called for a new costume, but the Camargo funds

would not permit such expenditure. Once again Mrs. Marks came to the rescue, and she handed Alicia sufficient money to buy the necessary roll of tarlatan.

"Go and get it," she said, "and we'll make it between us."

It was a race against time. Doris and Vivienne were given yards to snip and gather, while her mother made herself responsible for "finishing," and Alicia looked after the tricky business of assembling and balancing the intricate frills. Mrs. Marks' bedroom was transformed into a workroom, and they worked right through the night prior to the performance to get the dress ready in time. At 4:30 A.M., Alicia drank her last cup of black tea, after her final fitting had met with unanimous approval.

She arrived at Covent Garden that evening in a state of high excitement, for this was the first time she had danced before the Queen of England, and was told by the management that she would be received by Her Majesty in the royal box after *Lac des Cygnes*. That piece of news added to the excitement of the evening, as did the general buzz of preparation backstage.

Alicia, always at the theater in good time, was particularly early, as she wanted to look her very best on that auspicious occasion. In order to give the impression of being moulded into her tutu, she arranged to have the bodice stitched on her, so that there would be no unsightly fastenings to mar the beauty of her swanlike torso. The dresser was in the middle of sewing her in when a flunky burst into the dressing room and said, "Miss Markova, come at once. Her Majesty is waiting to receive you in the royal box. There has been a change

in the order of presentation, and Her Majesty will see you *before* you dance instead of afterward."

There was no question of argument or protest. Her Majesty could not be kept waiting. Alicia had to go. The dresser stuck the needle into the half-stitched costume, and Alicia hurried to the royal box. Her Majesty Queen Mary greeted the Swan Queen with a smile. Always intensely curious about dress materials, the Queen examined the tarlatan, and then stood back to survey the general design of the costume.

"What a beautiful dress!" she exclaimed. "Turn round and let me see the back."

A queen has to be obeyed, so Alicia had to revolve before Her Majesty, thus bring the needle and cotton into view. Not expecting to turn her back on the Queen, she didn't think the royal eye would notice her half-sewn condition. Her Majesty may have seen the needle, but she made no comment: she merely inquired who had made so exquisite a costume. Alicia replied that her mother had made it.

"Will she be here tonight?" the Queen inquired.

On hearing that the dancer's mother was ill, she sent her greetings and told Alicia to express her sorrow.

"It is a pity that the creator of the costume cannot be present to see it worn to such perfection."

A few minutes later Alicia withdrew from the royal box, more excited than ever because of the personal message Her Majesty the Queen had given her for her mother.

Then the orchestra struck the familiar chords, and Alicia made her entrance as the ethereal Swan Queen looking more appealing in her fragility than I had ever seen her.

It was a wonderful royal evening, both in the vast audience and on the stage, and a milestone in British Ballet.

It was all very well to dance at Covent Garden on gala nights, but there was no remuneration apart from the honor and glory. After Alicia's mother had bought the tarlatan for a new costume and paid the girl's taxi fare to and from Covent Garden she was out of pocket. Several shillings she could ill afford had been spent on providing entertainment for the Economic Conference delegates. Some sort of engagement that would bring in money must be found.

Once again Freddie Ashton came to the rescue by suggesting that Alicia should appear at the Regal Cinema at Marble Arch where decorative stage shows were featured between the films. Realizing that she was having a difficult time financially, Freddie arranged for her to appear in a hunting scene which was presented four times daily and in which, surrounded on the stage by a pack of real hounds, Dale Smith sang. Alicia danced for the princely sum of £20 a week, which was something of a contrast to the ten shillings sixpence she had earned at the Ballet Club.

The scene was so realistic, and Alicia's fox dance was so strenuous, that by the end of the first day she was covered with bruises, bumps, and scratches. Doris, who attended her in the dressing room, was continually running out to a nearby drugstore to get lint and plasters for Alicia's battered knees and elbows. There was little or no artistic satisfaction in the engagement, but it helped the family to pay the rent, and it pleased Alicia to win genuinely warm applause from people who had come primarily to see the films but obviously enjoyed this popular manifestation of ballet.

Funds were still at a low ebb in the Marks establishment, and Alicia did her share of the housework. She disliked ironing, as it made such heavy demands upon her patience, so she usually bargained with Doris or Vivienne, offering to undertake their washing if they would do her ironing.

Mrs. Marks was fond of flowers, but there was little opportunity of enjoying any in those days, except through the florist's window. To save a penny a day Alicia would often walk to the best fare stage nearer home before she boarded the bus in order to save enough money to buy a bunch of violets or anemones from the old lady who sold them outside the subway station.

At this time I helped Alicia by arranging a concert tour with her in the summer and a series of appearances at Stoll music halls.

Another touching act of kindness came from Cyril Beaumont, England's greatest living authority on the ballet. His bookshop in Charing Cross Road is devoted almost entirely to works on the dance, and is an Aladdin's Cave to all who love dancing, with wonderful pictures of every dancer whose name has proved sufficiently famous to come down the years. It is a miniature museum and a Mecca for all who want to revive their memories of nights at the ballet by discovering references in print.

Cyril Beaumont immensely admired Alicia's work when he saw her dancing on Sunday nights at the Ballet Club, and he invited her to call at his shop and browse over the ballet books whenever she happened to be passing. He made it quite clear that she could stay as long as she pleased and need feel under no obligation to purchase anything. In this way he

gave her a chance to learn something of the history of the great dancers who had gone before her, the immortals whose steps she was now following.

A few days after he issued the invitation, Alicia decided to drop into his shop on her way home to lunch. She was so enthralled that it was eight o'clock in the evening before she reached home.

"Wherever have you been?" cried her distressed mother.

"In Mr. Beaumont's back room!" answered Alicia simply.

Afterward, whenever Alicia was missing, it became a family joke to suppose that she was in Mr. Beaumont's back room!

That back room was a rather wonderful place. It had a chair tucked away in a cozy corner, near the stove. When Alicia called, her host would select a few books from the shelves and send her off to the corner chair to read them. More than anything, she liked to read about Taglioni, intrigued by the ethereal quality of the great dancer who brought romanticism to the ballet, with her unearthly dancing in *La Sylphide*. Reading about the birth of the *ballet blanc* had a great fascination for Alicia, making the ballets of today all the more interesting, since she was able to trace their origin.

Because of Cyril Beaumont's introduction, Alicia now feels that she knows Taglioni, and has formed so vivid an impression of her that she might easily be a personality in her own life. She talks to her friends about Taglioni so convincingly that anyone not aware that the great ballerina died at Marseilles in 1884, eighty years of age, might easily imagine that Alicia had known her well.

Remembering her love for this Queen of the Romantic



Ballet, Cyril Beaumont gave one of Taglioni's letters to Alicia on the night she danced *Lac des Cygnes* in full for the first time at Sadler's Wells Theatre. It is a model of politeness, asking a theater manager for a couple of complimentary tickets, and inquiring most courteously about his wife's health, hoping that she had recovered from a recent malady.

Alicia's long absence from England during World War II did not cause Cyril Beaumont to forget that she worshiped Taglioni more devotedly than any other ballerina, and when Alicia was dressing at Covent Garden in the summer of 1948 to make her first appearance in *Giselle*, she received a little package which had been handed in at the stage door. It was marked: *Urgent. To Be Opened on Receipt*. Putting down her make-up mirror, she opened the little box. It contained a reel of mending silk. It was accompanied by a note of good wishes from Mr. Beaumont, who wrote: "This reel is from Taglioni's workbox. Break off a piece and wear it in your shoe for luck tonight." She obeyed the suggestion, and though she is far from superstitious, she feels that she has never received a more inspiring token of appreciation.

In New York, some years earlier, Carl Van Vechten had given Alicia a glazed coral choker which once belonged to Taglioni. He brought it around to her dressing room after she had impersonated Taglioni in my ballet, *Pas de Quatre*. Imagine her joy when the necklace fitted her so perfectly that it might easily have been made for her. She treasures it in the tortoise-shell box in which Taglioni used to keep it.

When Alicia first visited Mr. Beaumont's back room, she was hungry for knowledge, and he enjoyed telling her all about those first Diaghileff performances in London when

Nijinsky and Karsavina were at the height of their fame. She was particularly fond of a picture of Karsavina in *The Good-Humoured Ladies*, as it brought back a memory of being taken by her mother to see this great artiste for the first time in that ballet, and she has never forgotten the sight of the ballerina's emerald-green ballet slippers. Previously, Alicia had seen only pink slippers, and she was fascinated by this innovation. She was also lost in admiration for the remarkable manner in which Karsavina pointed her feet and the incredible speed of her steps, which was really something at which to marvel. Proudly she told Mr. Beaumont that she possessed a Karsavina souvenir, that, for her birthday, Marie Rambert had given her the bodice which Karsavina had worn in the last act of *Giselle*. Later, she was to acquire Olga Spessiva's *Giselle* slippers.

Théophile Gautier was a writer Alicia enjoyed. It thrilled her to read his colorful accounts of Carlotta Grisi in *Giselle*. It was wonderful to be able to study a graphic account of a man who had actually seen her dance, and a man who was able to express himself so masterfully. By reading the work of the older critics, Alicia began to see the classical ballets in the right light. She looked upon them as antiques and not as old-fashioned relics to be laughed at. As she once said, "We do not laugh at a Louis Quinze chair, even if we do not happen to care for the period." She took pleasure in looking at the lithographs of the early nineteenth-century ballerinas, as they seemed to convey all the excitement of the theater of their period. One could sense the very atmosphere of the ballets in which they danced, with their misty forests and enchanted lakes, which stirred the imagination so vividly.

She had a special affection for prints of the temperamental Fanny Elssler, feeling that she must have had a good deal in common with Danilova. In such spirited dances as the Fandango and the Cachucha, she must have been something like Danilova in the Cancan from *La Boutique Fantasque*.



## CHAPTER SIX

# SADLER'S WELLS



WHILE Marie Rambert was catering to an audience of connoisseurs at the Ballet Club on Sunday evenings, Ninette de Valois began to think about establishing a troupe that would have a wider and more popular appeal. London had seen no ballet since the death of Diaghileff two years previously, apart from that at Marie Rambert's bandbox theater. De Valois felt that the time might be ripe to prove whether ballet appealed to the masses or whether it was only highbrow entertainment for the cultured few.

To put her plan into effect, she engaged the attention of that eccentric genius, Lilian Baylis, who was running the twin theaters of the Old Vic on the south bank of the Thames in Waterloo Road and Sadler's Wells on the north bank in Islington. They were known as the homes of Shakespeare and opera in English where, for sixpence, one could go up in the

gallery and hear popular operatic classics well sung or see the great John Gielgud in *Hamlet*.

Both houses were flourishing, and Miss de Valois was anxious to try ballet on this democratic public who knew their Shakespeare well enough to prompt the actors and who knew their Verdi well enough to be aware of Violeta avoiding a top note in her opening coloratura aria.

On May 5, 1931, Ninette de Valois gathered together a handful of dancers, known as the Vic-Wells Ballet, to give their first performance at the Old Vic. I gladly accepted her invitation to appear as the first guest artiste. It was only a program of odds and ends, but it met with definite approval, and encouraged further spasmodic performances throughout the summer. These were so successful that when the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells opened for the autumn season, a fortnightly ballet night became a regular feature at each theater.

Later, as ballet took a firmer grip on the public, it was given only at Sadler's Wells Theatre, and thus the Sadler's Wells Ballet Company was born. In the short space of fifteen years it grew into the most important ballet company in western Europe, and later moved into Covent Garden Opera House, now its permanent home.

No one can ever estimate how much the company owes to Markova. Had it not been for her, I doubt whether the Sadler's Wells Ballet would exist today. She, and she alone, put that company firmly on its feet. Others helped most generously—Lydia Lopokova, Phyllis Bedells, Stanislas Idzikowsky, and I were frequent guests—but it was Markova, with her loyalty and hard work, to say nothing of her amazing grasp of an enormous repertoire, that made the company, plus

the genius and masterly direction of Ninette de Valois.

It was on Saturday, January 30, 1932, that Alicia accepted Ninette's invitation and danced with the Vic-Wells Company for the first time, at the Sadler's Wells for a matinee and at the Old Vic in the evening. She danced in *Cephalus and Procris*, set to Grétry's delicate music, and, with Stanley Judson, she appeared in a ballet by Ninette de Valois entitled *Narcissus and Echo*, dancing barefoot on different levels, while four figures dressed in black and white were posed decoratively on a flight of steps.

Ballets did not mean much to the people who attended these performances, but they were enchanted by the guest ballerina of the occasion. She was so frail, so different, and danced so delightfully that they looked forward to seeing her again, no matter in what role she happened to be dancing. That is the secret of the early success of the Vic-Wells Ballet.

First and foremost they came to see Alicia Markova, and in coming to see *her* over and over again, they acquired a liking for ballet itself and began to develop a sense of values. By the time De Basil brought his company to London for its first appearance there, in 1933, Markova had popularized ballet to such an extent that the public flocked to the West End to see the new baby ballerinas, Baronova, Toumanova, and Riabouchinska.

So instantaneous was Alicia's success at the Wells, that the management invited us both to dance in a special season there in March at a fee of five guineas each. In that same summer of 1932 we were both dancing at the Savoy Theatre during the Camargo season with such glittering guest stars as Olga Spessiva, Lydia Lopokova, Ruth French, and Phyllis Bedells.

Spessiva's Giselle was the talk of London, and I was proud to have been chosen as her Albrecht, a role which, with infinite care and devotion, she taught me herself.

Lilian Baylis sensed that ballet was going to get a grip on the public and was anxious not to miss the opportunity of securing Alicia's services. She recognized artistic magnetism when she saw it, so she wrote to Alicia in good time, knowing that the inclusion of her name on the advance billing would fill her theaters during the autumn, though she refused to offer more than five guineas a performance however much other managements were willing to pay.

The letter she wrote to Alicia is a key to the policy which put those two theaters on such a firm and flourishing basis.

THE OLD VIC,  
Waterloo Road,  
S.E.1.  
1. 6. 32.

Dear Alicia Markova,

All we yet know definitely about next season is that we propose to devote one evening a week to Ballet, and that we hope that you, and others, who helped us in the past, will be associated with us again.

As it is quite possible that we shall issue some general advance bills before details are settled, will you let us have a line to say that we may put your name among those of the guest artistes?

We would offer you five guineas a performance, as before. I want you to do lots of well-paid work, but hope you'll manage to come to us in between the good engagements.

Yours very sincerely,  
LILIAN BAYLIS

Alicia accepted the offer, and the following October we



danced together in Act II of *Lac des Cygnes*, with Stanley Judson as Benno. Ballet was beginning to boom, as was apparent from the two thousand people who turned up at Sadler's Wells on the opening night. The repertoire was gradually but slowly being enlarged. With *Job*, *Spectre de la Rose*, and *Les Sylphides* among the longer ballets, it could hardly be regarded now as a succession of scrappy bits and pieces.

Early in 1933 Lopokova danced Swanhilda in *Coppélia* when the company appeared in the two command performances at Covent Garden at which Queen Mary admired Alicia's homemade costume. After that season I ceased to be a guest artiste of the company, but Alicia stayed on for a while.

Not many weeks after we had danced *Lac des Cygnes* at Sadler's Wells, Alicia left the Vic-Wells Company for a short time, in order to accept some of the "well-paid work" of which Miss Baylis hoped she would do "lots."

In November 1932 Markova and Harold Turner appeared together in a ballet devised by Frederick Ashton in a lavish musical show at the Alhambra, entitled *A Kiss in Spring*. Despite music by Kalman and Herbert Griffiths and a cast which included Marie Lohr, Billy Milton, Eric Bertner, Kenneth Kove, Eileen Moody, and Sylvia Welling, the show was dull, never coming to life until the final scene, when Ashton's lovely little ballet took the stage.

Two leading London papers hailed it in their headlines. One said: *A Ballet That Steals the Show*, and the other, *Ballet Saves a Play*. Alicia read in print that she need not feel shy of the ghosts of famous dancers who watched her from the wings of that historic stage.

It was a triumph for British Ballet in a popular show and brought Alicia to the notice of the vast theater-going public for the first time in her career. I was glad to see her on that huge stage in a large theater. Hassard Short, a genius of the theater, had lighted the show as well as produced it, and Alicia had for the first time, in my opinion, taken on an aura of real glamour. I was enthusiastic about her beauty. It was good to think that she had escaped from the postage-stamp stage of the Ballet Club. I know she did important work there, but, I never really liked her at the Ballet Club. Though her dancing was superb, and she was dressed with impeccably good taste, I did not consider she looked her best when seen at such close quarters. She had not the glamour which she has today.

As Ninette de Valois once remarked to me, "Alicia has none of the natural attributes of a great ballerina, yet she has gained the pinnacle and remained there."

Her legs are not quite straight, her nose is a little large for her face, and her arabesque is not particularly high, yet she has overcome all these handicaps and perfected her art with a beauty that haunts all who have seen her dance. I am convinced that her dancing arms and hands are the most beautiful of all time. Only Spessiva, of all the great dancers I have seen, had feet comparable to Markova's. She has a beautiful natural pointe, and even now her feet are those of a young girl. No one would imagine that she had been dancing almost ceaselessly for more than a quarter of a century.

*A Kiss in Spring* gave the first hint of the beauty that was to emerge from the chrysalis. *Punch* was so captivated by the success of the ballet that the critic suggested that the dullest

passages of the show be cut and the time thus gained handed over to the dancers!

The run was short, and Alicia was soon back at the Wells, but with an enhanced prestige.

Now Lilian Baylis realized that she would have to make Alicia's agreements with her theaters more attractive if she wished to keep her. Alicia had made her first success in the so-called commercial theater. In the summer of 1933 we find an increase in salary suggested:

THE OLD VIC,  
Waterloo Road,  
S.E.1.

14. 6. 33.

Dear Alicia Markova,

I have spoken to Ninette, and we agree to making the offer for next season ten pounds a week, this to cover your appearances in the ballet performances and your help as choreographer when necessary.

We will certainly wait a week for a final answer from you, and we do very much hope that it will be possible for you to throw your fortunes in with ours.

Yours very sincerely,  
LILIAN BAYLIS

Alicia agreed to accept the offer, so once again Lilian Baylis replied with the same suggestion that Alicia should take all the better-paid work that came her way, but in every instance she was to be certain that the Vic-Wells Ballet Company had some sort of recognition in the printed material concerning these other engagements.

Lilian Baylis never lost an opportunity to get publicity for

her theaters, even giving a dozen handbills to everyone who called at her office, with instructions to distribute them among their friends, and thus another dozen people would know what was happening at her homes of Shakespeare and of opera in English—to say nothing of British Ballet! She expressed her delight at Alicia's acceptance in a letter which read:

THE OLD VIC,  
Waterloo Road,  
S.E.1.  
28. 6. 33.

Dear Alicia Markova,

I am so glad that you will be with us next season. Your decision does, indeed, make us happy.

Of course you can take other engagements which do not interfere with our work, but we would like you to let us know when these occur, and to make an acknowledgment to this management on their printing.

I hope you enjoyed dancing last night. You were in perfect form, and I loved every minute of you.

Yours sincerely,  
LILIAN BAYLIS

Alicia's decision to stay with the Vic-Wells Ballet was momentous. She reigned as prima ballerina at Sadler's Wells from the autumn of 1933 until May 1935 and carried the repertoire almost alone. There was little or no financial reward for this engagement, but Alicia felt it was a great consolation and her first stroke of good fortune since the death of Diaghileff. Ninette de Valois agreed that one of the classics should be revived for Alicia each season, so that she would

at last have the chance of dancing the great roles which would have been hers by right had Diaghileff lived long enough to carry out his plans. The ballets *Giselle*, *Casse Noisette*, and *Lac des Cygnes* in their entirety were revived for her, and she would have danced Aurora in *The Sleeping Beauty* had she stayed on after the spring of 1935. In addition, she appeared in about three new modern works each season.

Ninette de Valois knew what she was doing when she urged Lilian Baylis to engage Alicia as prima ballerina. She knew the precarious financial status of the Marks family and the detrimental effect it might have on Alicia's work. She knew the peace of mind that a contract which meant a regular income for eight months of the year would bring to Alicia. As soon as it was signed, she was able to budget for the future. Together with the family, she left St. Quintin's Avenue in North Kensington and took a flat at Marble Arch, overlooking Hyde Park.

It was a brave step to take, as her salary was far from fabulous, but she knew that Doris would be able to help with the rent, for she had a good job as a leading soubrette at the Windmill Theatre. Vivienne was already in the Civil Service, so her income was assured, even though it was modest at the beginning. Bunny was growing into the beauty of the family, and Alicia already visualized her in the corps de ballet of the Vic-Wells Company, thereby bringing in yet a few more shillings toward the increased cost of a fashionable and more expensive address.

The public at Sadler's Wells had not been happy about Alicia's precarious position there any more than she had. When they heard that she had signed a contract which meant

she had come to stay, they gave her a rapturous welcome on the opening night of the autumn season of 1933, when she danced *Spectre de la Rose* with Stanislas Idzikowsky, premier danseur in Diaghileff's company and one of the greatest dancers of that time. One critic said it was worth traveling across Europe to see. She also danced the Blue Bird pas de deux with Idzikowsky. On that occasion the new work was Ninette de Valois' new ballet, *The Wise and Foolish Virgins*, with music by Kurt Atterberg and décor by William Chappell.

*Les Rendezvous*, Frederick Ashton's first ballet for the Wells, was the great event. He chose some of Auber's most vivacious tunes, which inspired William Chappell to design some most becoming costumes. In addition to Alicia the cast included Ninette de Valois, Idzikowsky, Stanley Judson, and Robert Helpmann, emerging from the corps de ballet for the first time.

Miss P. W. Manchester, in her book, *Vic-Wells, A Ballet Progress*, gives the finest word picture of Alicia:

"The leading role gave Markova her finest creation for the Wells, and this ballet has never been the same without her. She was entrancing in her grey dress with the big red flowers on either side of her smooth head. No one who saw her will ever forget her exit at the end of her brilliant solo, head jauntily tilted, shoulders and arms delicately lifted, her narrow feet exquisitely placed. The whole ballet was designed as a showpiece to display her particular gifts of speed, precision, and lightness, and it was an uproarious success."

Alicia had become the darling of the Wells. She was cheered to the echo at every performance. Older balletomanes

saw her growing resemblance to Pavlova, and considering the triumphant manner in which she grasped every chance that came her way, they must have wondered if she would eventually attain as lofty a position in the world of the dance as the great ballerina whose death they had all mourned.

The crucial test was to come with *Giselle*, which was scheduled at the Old Vic for New Year's Day, 1934. Would Alicia be able to hold her own with such distinguished predecessors as Carlotta Grisi, Anna Pavlova, Tamara Karsavina, and Olga Spessiva?

*Giselle* is the dream role of every ballerina, possessing the sort of magnetism that Hamlet has for the actor. The première took place at the Paris Opera in 1841, and the ballet has been continuously performed ever since, both in Europe and America, so we still feel a contact with the original production which created a sensation in Paris with Carlotta Grisi and Lucien Petipa in the leading roles. It still remains the most glorious example of the Romantic Age of Ballet. No other work offers the ballerina such tremendous opportunities.

In the first act she is the spotless village maiden with an undying love for the handsome peasant named Loys. The arrival of a hunting party in the district brings to light the fact that Loys is really Count Albrecht in disguise, a wealthy landowner betrothed to the Duke of Courland's daughter. It is too much for the trusting *Giselle*. Her brain snaps. Madness and death take possession of her.

The second act, the complete antithesis of the first, reveals *Giselle* rising from her tomb in the forest to dance with the Wilis, the spirits of girls who loved dancing too much on

earth. She is no longer a human being but an ethereal vision as elusive as moonlight. Few dancers are equally impressive in both acts, but Alicia is certainly one of them. Her Giselle has become the criterion by which all others in this generation are judged.

Apart from seeing Pavlova dance Giselle in her gravecloth draperies, Alicia had never seen the ballet until Olga Spessiva danced it with me during the Camargo season at the Savoy in 1932. She understudied Spessiva during that season and told my mother afterward, a little sadly, that she had not had a chance to dance the role, as Spessiva never once was "off."

The great Russian ballerina's dancing was a revelation. Alicia knew that she would never be really happy until she had danced the part, though she could see no possibility of realizing her ambition at that time. Spessiva saw in Alicia her successor and an ideal interpreter of the role, so she insisted that she should have a chair placed in the wings to enable her to observe every detail of the performance at close quarters. Alicia wept at the end of the first act after the deeply moving mad scene. There was magic in Spessiva's dancing in the moonlit wood in the second act.

Olga Spessiva's rendering of the role of Giselle was the ultimate and last word in perfection. Flawless, terrifyingly and tragically beautiful, it has never been superseded. Only Alicia, during the last twenty years, has re-created the magic that was Spessiva's and imbued the role with her own greatness. As she watched Spessiva during that Camargo season in all humility, she never felt she could hope to equal the great interpretation of Giselle. From Spessiva she received encour-



agement and listened eagerly to all she had to say about this complex role which had baffled so many of the great dancers of the past.

When *Giselle* was revived for Alicia by the Vic-Wells Ballet, Ninette de Valois consulted Sergueff, who had formerly come from St. Petersburg to stage *The Sleeping Beauty* for Diaghileff at the Alhambra. This *régisseur* of the Maryinsky Theatre guaranteed the authenticity of the first production of the ballet ever attempted by a British company. His notes were based on the ballet as it had been performed in St. Petersburg in the eighties, when Marius Petipa revived the standardized version which Perrot, Grisi's husband, had produced in Russia in 1851.

Rehearsals were held at Sadler's Wells for six weeks. For three hours every morning Alicia worked alone in the board room with Sergueff, while he explained the significance of every movement. He was very strict and very stubborn. He had his own ideas about *Giselle*, and considered his word law. He had no time for newfangled notions. To him *Giselle* was sacred. Not a step had to be altered.

In any case there was no necessity to alter anything, as each nuance of the original choreography by Coralli and Perrot had its own definite meaning. Alicia was given a picture of the ballet as it had been performed on the Maryinsky stage, and it still seemed as vital to her as any contemporary work. Never for a moment did it seem to be old-fashioned. Sergueff gave her the right approach and the character of *Giselle* emerged, as human as any creation of the great dramatists. It was not just a vehicle for the prima ballerina to dazzle admirers with her miraculous technique, but a real character

waiting to be interpreted by a dancer with the soul of an actress.

This aspect of the role was clarified in those solitary morning sessions with Sergueff. After a light lunch in the canteen, they would work with the full company for four hours in the afternoon, when Alicia would dovetail her work into the full-scale production. Her conception of the part was not directly influenced by Spessiva, nor did she attempt to copy her. Already, under Sergueff's guidance, she was beginning to formulate her own individual ideas about the tragic maiden of the vineyards. She knew that a certain section of the public were inclined to believe that a British dancer would be out of her depth in so gigantic a role. Alicia Markova was determined to give them cause to revise their ideas.

New Year's Day, 1934, produced one of those characteristic London fogs which plunge the great city into what seems to be eternal night. It reminded Alicia of the day she had left for Monte Carlo, to dance *Giselle* for the first time in her life, and to prove that a British dancer could undertake so great a feat. I was extremely happy to be her Albrecht, after having partnered the divine Spessiva in the same part two years previously.

There was an excitement backstage that night which I shall never forget. We knew that if we could get through the evening with honors we would make ballet history and prove that British dancers could hold their own with the rest of the world.

The theater had been sold out for days, though when the curtain rose there were patches of unoccupied seats belonging to disappointed fogbound enthusiasts.

Alicia Markova did not touch perfection that night, as she has done since, in what has become her greatest role. No one could hope to dance Giselle to perfection the very first time. It is a role that mellows a little each time it is danced, and thus requires many performances before it can reach an ideal interpretation.

But Alicia gave an unforgettable performance, particularly in the second act. It was truly great dancing. No other artiste seen in London had approached such spiritual beauty. Alicia had scored a personal and a national victory; she held the audience with her tragic mime and then proceeded to dazzle and dumbfound them with the soaring beauty of her dancing in the forest scene.

Two great ballerinas of a former epoch—Lydia Lopokova and Lydia Kyasht—were the first to enter her dressing room to congratulate her. They knew the Maryinsky tradition, and they knew the historical significance of the performance they had just witnessed.

The critics were lavish in their praise. Nothing is more wearisome than reading a succession of laudatory press cuttings about any artistic triumph, but I beg leave to quote what *Time and Tide* said about Alicia Markova's first Giselle, as it seems to have captured the very essence of the occasion.

"In presenting Alicia Markova in the title role of Giselle, the Vic-Wells Ballet has created a precedent. Never before has an English dancer been entrusted with this role. Technically flawless, Markova has at last been given the opportunity to show that her range of mime runs from gaiety to poignancy and includes both. In a ballet that is little more than a frame for the principal dancers, her village Ophelia was neither overweighted by tradition

nor overstylized by a lack of respect for tradition. She approached the role with simplicity and sincerity, and never can a great artist have tempered dancing cadenza less with personal showmanship. By her exquisite rising to the pointes—with a lightness supremely her own—and a mastery of poise in *developpé* and *arabesque sûr les pointes* that admits her to the elect of great ballerinas, she was the perfect instrument through which the tragic tale was transmitted.”

Hundreds of thousands of words have been written about Alicia's *Giselle* since that foggy New Year's night, but even the best of them are third-party opinions. No one knows what Alicia herself thinks about *Giselle* because she has never been persuaded to express her opinion.

As I think it ranks with Melba's Mimi and Chaliapin's Boris Godunov as one of the greatest artistic creations of the century, I suggested that she should record her own impressions of the part and what it meant to her. She promised she would do so, but she never seemed to get sufficient leisure to give the matter any serious consideration. We were always too occupied with performances or traveling for Alicia to write her personal impressions.

Then her great chance came at Christmas, 1949. We had just finished a provincial tour, and Alicia planned to have a month's holiday in her sister's newly acquired London flat in Knightsbridge while I appeared as St. George of England in *Where the Rainbow Ends*, a children's play which is revived in London every Christmas.

No sooner had Alicia started to enjoy her holiday, devoted to catching up on sleep, taking her small niece to feed the ducks in the park, and browsing round the stores for presents,

than she developed a very bad cold. Unable to shake it off, she called in the doctor. He forbade her to leave the flat for a few days, lest more serious complications set in. She could not rouse any enthusiasm for reading, sewing, or even gossiping with friends who were prepared to go to see her.

"I know what you can do," I suggested brightly. "You can write a letter to me—all about *Giselle*. Here is your chance to record your own impressions. Write to me as if I knew nothing about it."

A day or two later I received the longest letter Alicia has ever written:

Park Mansions,  
Knightsbridge,  
London, S.W.1.  
December 20, 1949

My dear Patté,

Lying here in bed with a wretched stupid cold, I have been thinking about *Giselle*. I feel utterly depressed and really don't want to see anyone except Tutu. You have not met Tutu, but you will the next time you come to see me. He is the most adorable little kitten, who has just been sent to me as a present from Brighton. He is a ballet cat because he has white back legs which make him look as if he is wearing white tights in readiness for a performance of *Les Sylphides*. But you don't want to know about *Les Sylphides*, do you?

Now what can I tell you about *Giselle*? Even before I danced it, I realized that it would be my favorite part if I ever had the good fortune to appear in it. No other role had such an instant and strong appeal for me. I was quite shaken when I saw Spessiva dance it with you for the first time, from my wicker chair in the wings at the Savoy. That sent me flying to "Mr. Beaumont's back room" to get some idea of the Giselles that had gone before. I remember that Carlotta Grisi gave the impression of being "so

slender, so frail, and yet so impervious to fatigue." I gloated over the lithographs and tried to learn as much as I could from them.

Two years later our chance came to dance the ballet together with the Vic-Wells. I was to be coached by Sergueff, who would put me right on all the baffling problems of my role. When we met for the first time, he delivered a long lecture about Giselle showing me how *not* to approach her. He knew I had seen Spessiva and I told him that I had read about other great interpretations. He stamped his foot and said it was quite wrong to imagine I could take stock of all the great Giselles of the past and then build up my own interpretation by trying to incorporate all the attractive aspects of each performance.

He told me that I must forget that the part had ever been danced before. If I wished my interpretation to ring true, I must treat it like a new ballet and work it out for myself. "The character," he explained, "is conveyed by the dancer herself and not by the steps devised by the choreographer. That is why there are so many Giselles. Only a dreary performance can result from a dancer with no original ideas of her own."

As we worked on the ballet week by week, I began to see the character of Giselle quite vividly, as real as any heroine in a play. The characterization was more fascinating than the technical problems of the dancing. The basic steps are only the structure upon which each ballerina builds her individual interpretation of the part. Giselle became so real a person to me that I forgot myself and seemed to enter the skin of a totally different being. I did not feel that I was dancing the role, I felt I *was* the role.

I suppose I have danced Giselle more frequently than any other ballerina in history, and certain changes have come about with the passing of time. I feel younger in the first act now than when I first danced it. I feel that the *simplicity* of the character is of vital importance. It seems to come as a sort of second nature now but in the beginning I was conscious of acting to give the impression of simplicity.

Sergueff insisted that the part should not be danced like a highly complicated technical exercise. He used to impress upon me the importance of never making a move unless I knew *why* I made it. It is necessary to use one's head as well as one's feet if one is to create a convincing impersonation of Giselle.

I have seen dancers, particularly in the second act, put up a performance which must have been as equally bewildering to them as it was to the audience. That act has been cut considerably, so that it is sometimes difficult to make sense of what remains. The Queen of the Wilis was originally a far greater role in the ballet, but now the part has been cut down to about a quarter of the original and, I am sure, lovely choreography. She should have two variations with the stage to herself, but that rarely happens in these days.

I have seen Giselles at a loss about their relationship to the Queen. Many a Giselle comes and bows before the Queen soon after rising from her grave, but one can tell from the stance and facial expression that the dancer has no idea *why* she is bowing. She does not realize that she bows because, in the traditional version of the ballet, the Queen touches Giselle with a wand causing wings to sprout from her shoulders. Only when that fact is realized, can there be meaning in the bow.

Spessiva used to rely on a mechanical device, so that the incident had more significance from the front. The wings of her costume were drawn in close to her sides by means of a thread of cotton. As she bowed before the Queen, she snapped the cotton with her thumb and wings sprang up from her shoulders. I have never had the courage to adopt the plan, and shall never forget how nervous Spessiva used to be until she had snapped the cotton. Perhaps one day, Patté, I will, for I know it would give you such satisfaction.

The only device I have used is a ramp in the last act to give the impression of flying through the air. If it is built among the trees at the back of the stage, the dancer can, by traveling at high speed, with quick but steady steps, give the impression of leaving

the ground and rising into the air. One false step is enough, though, to shatter the illusion.

But we are getting away from the character of Giselle herself, and the whole ballet stands or falls by that. The story is quite plausible if the ballerina can convince the audience that Giselle is the essence of purity, not only young, but completely naïve. Unless she can convey that impression, she fails at the outset, no matter how brilliantly she executes the technicalities of the dancing.

Giselle is the most devoted and sincere of maidens, and Albrecht is the sum total of her thoughts. It never crosses her mind that he could deceive her. She is annoyed by the attentions of Hilarion, because she has eyes only for Albrecht, and she believes that he lives for her alone. It is her trusting innocence that makes the discovery of his betrayal a blow, at once cruel and overwhelming. It is this shock that unhinges her simple mind and, grasping Albrecht's sword, she rushes round in her delirium and before he can take it from her tightly clasped hands, she has stabbed fatally her broken heart.

The Mad Scene has led to endless discussion. I will ignore the other theories and give you my own. Giselle, to my way of thinking, is not a suicide. Her brain snaps as the result of a very severe mental shock and an ensuing nervous and emotional collapse. When she sees the sword on the ground, according to Sergueff, she takes it to be a serpent. She picks it up by the point and presses it to her bosom, like Cleopatra and the asp. Had she wished to kill herself by the sword, she would have picked it up by the hilt and driven it through her body, or fallen upon it in the best Roman tradition. By that time she is isolated from the others because she no longer recognizes them. Her strength begins to ebb, and her heartbeats show signs of exhaustion.

At this point, some ballerinas look at their hands with horror, imagining they are covered with blood from the wound. There is no blood on her hands because the wound was a mere pinprick. Giselle regards her hands and arms with terror because they are



growing cold and she is conscious of an increasing paralysis. She rubs them in a futile attempt to restore the circulation. Then her breathing gives trouble. She feels she is choking. It is the end. She collapses on the ground, dying because she has nothing to live for. The melodramatic scene can only be moving and convincing if the *Giselle* is pure and innocent; such a fate could never overtake a coquette.

In the second act, *Giselle* should be portrayed as an equally pure and noble spirit. She is above revenge. After suffering on earth and dying, she finds her soul and is at peace. She is sorry for Albrecht as he comes in search of her grave in the forest, because she feels his suffering is deeper than hers and certainly lasts longer.

If the dancing is to make a convincing spirit, her breathing must be under complete control. The part makes heavier demands on the ballerina than any other role in the repertoire, because the emotional side is so exhausting. Following the histrionic outburst at the end of Act One she is faced with all the most exacting dancing when she takes on spirit form. Then there must be no sign of heavy breathing or human exhaustion. The effort must be concealed at all costs.

I can never tell in advance just how I am going to dance a performance of *Giselle*. I am always striving—perhaps too diligently—after perfection, and on that account I suppose only about one performance in two dozen gives me real satisfaction. Only when both acts are evenly balanced and when the technical, histrionic, and emotional aspects of the performance are as perfect as I can hope to make them—only then do I feel that I can rest on my laurels for five minutes.

Have you ever realized, Patté, that there is less partnering in *Giselle* than in any other classical ballet? In the first act, apart from a couple of lifts, we dance side by side. The only point at which we touch is the adagio in the second act. There is not a single supported pirouette in the entire ballet. As the timing and the acting are so important in such interwoven dances, our part-

nership in this ballet might be summed up as "all timing and no touching."

Few of the audience realize that the first-act variation never existed in the Carlotta Grisi version of *Giselle*. It was interpolated by Spessiva, as a prima donna might introduce a favorite song into the Music Lesson scene of *The Barber of Seville*. Spessiva was so fond of this variation, which she danced to a manuscript piece of music, that she always included it, and now it has become part and parcel of the ballet. I always enjoy dancing it as an act of homage to the greatest *Giselle* I ever hope to see.

Newspaper people often ask me if I get tired of dancing *Giselle* year after year. I can honestly say that I have never faced a single performance without a feeling of happy anticipation.

The secret lies in the fact that the part calls for interpretation. It is so much more than a succession of intricate ballet mechanics that it comes up as a fresh problem every time I dance it. The tempo can vary at every performance, according to my mood, and so to me the ballet remains as fresh as ever, after hundreds of repetitions. I never take it for granted and therefore the magic of *Giselle* is always there, as well as that glowing feeling of having really accomplished something worth while as the curtain falls.

I hope this very-long-letter-for-me will give you some idea of my regard for my favorite part.

Poor Tutu has just walked in from the bathroom, looking the picture of dejection, and sopping wet. I cannot think what has happened, but I must go at once and put him under my hair dryer or he will die of pneumonia.

I am feeling much better.

All my love to you,

ALICIA

The token of appreciation which Alicia received from Lilian Baylis after her first *Giselle* triumph is typical of the woman who rebuilt Sadler's Wells without a penny in the

bank. Alicia had been invited to dance at the Albert Hall in a lavish production of *Elijah*, with Albert Coates conducting. At the Court of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, Alicia was to dance a solo to Mendelssohn's *Spring Song*. Naturally, she had to ask Miss Baylis for permission to accept the engagement. Two days after her historic opening performance as *Giselle*, she received a characteristic Baylis letter.

THE OLD VIC,  
Waterloo Road,  
S.E.1.

3. 1. 34-

Dear Alicia,

I have spoken to Ninette and understand that it will still be possible for you to dance in our ballets on February 13th and 20th, if you accept the Albert Hall engagement, so we will gladly give you permission to do so, and know that you will see that they give us as much publicity as possible in connection with your appearance with them.

I *loved* your work on Monday. It made me very proud and happy, and I am sure that you, too, were pleased. I am glad that the press was so good—you deserved every word they said.

Yours very sincerely,

LILIAN BAYLIS

Four weeks after *Giselle*, Alicia tackled her second major creation for the Vic-Wells Ballet when *Casse Noisette* was produced by Sergueff for the first time in its entirety outside Russia. Alicia danced the Sugar Plum Fairy with Stanley Judson as the Prince. Elsa Lanchester was seen in the *Danse Arabe*; Robert Helpmann and Travis Kemp in the *Danse Chinois*; Ursula Moreton and Antony Tudor in the *Spanish Dance*; and Molly Brown danced the little child Clara, the

part which Lopokova danced on her debut in St. Petersburg at the age of eleven.

The Lord Mayor of London lent his Boy Pipers to play the Twelve Mice, and the Royal College of Music dug the full score out of their archives and placed it at the disposal of the company.

It was a grand example of teamwork, and the result was another popular triumph for the Vic-Wells.

Concerning Alicia, Miss Manchester has written of that production: "To most of us [Markova] was, is, and always will be the one and only Sugar Plum Fairy. She was brittle and sparkling, like the frosted icing on a Christmas cake. There was a crystalline purity in every movement, and she made the beautiful adagio an unforgettable experience."

It was on the occasion of this production that Alicia was paid what she considers the greatest compliment of her career. Doris was sitting next to a little boy who turned to his mother when Alicia made her entrance as the Sugar Plum Fairy and cried: "Oh, Mummie, can I have her for my Christmas tree next year?" She had captured the child's heart, which is what the Sugar Plum Fairy should do.

The Sugar Plum Fairy, who reigns over the Kingdom of Sweets, commands a performance for Clara and dances for her pleasure. Despite her unreality, she has a kind and gracious nature, and her dancing should have the same glittering quality as sugar icing. She sets out to give the child happiness, to show her a veritable load of make-believe.

Robert Helpmann created his first major role on April 3, 1934, when the Vic-Wells Company presented *The Haunted Ballroom*. As the Master of Treginnis, doomed to dance to

death with the ghosts that haunt his own picture gallery, he gave a magnificent performance. Music by Geoffrey Toye, choreography by Ninette de Valois, décor by Motley, and highly imaginative lighting all contrived to make this *Grand Guignol* ballet a perfect piece of theater. It was another triumph of teamwork, with Alicia moving silently and swiftly about the stage, almost as transparent as her ghostly draperies.

In May Lilian Baylis began to think about the autumn season, and hearing that Alicia was anxious to remain, in order to dance in the full-length *Lac des Cygnes*, she wrote:

THE OLD VIC,  
Waterloo Road,  
S.E.1.

5. 5. 34.

Dear Alicia Markova,

I am so happy that you want to return to us next season, and I hope you will feel that you can do so for the weekly salary of £12.0.0, with an additional fiver to cover extra performances in the week.

The matinee on the Saturday in April was so successful that we want to experiment with one a month for the early part of next season. I hope that they will do well—I think they ought to.

It is such a happiness to me to have you with us, and I know that Ninette too rejoices not only in your lovely work, but in the help you give her generally. Thank you so much for it all.

Your sincere friend and manager,  
LILLIAN BAYLIS

Alicia, despite her meek and mild nature, felt that she was worth more than £12, as her every appearance packed the theater and roused the audience to cheering enthusiasm at curtain fall. She held out for more money and indicated,

by way of polite blackmail, that she would have to leave the company if nothing could be done about it.

Lilian Baylis was far too good a businesswoman to let so magnificent a box-office attraction walk out of her theater; she raised Alicia's salary to the princely sum of £15. Her confirmation reads:

THE OLD VIC,  
Waterloo Road,  
S.E.1.  
16. 5. 34.

Dear Alicia Markova,

Thank you for your letter.

We just feel that we would hate to lose you, and that your presence in the company, and your general willingness to help in all sorts of ways is invaluable, so we will make your weekly salary £15.0.0 (Fifteen pounds) with £5.0.0. for any extra performances.

Will you let us have your acceptance of next season's work on these terms as soon as you can?

I am so glad that you feel you want to stay with us.

Yours sincerely,

LILIAN BAYLIS

The autumn season of 1934 opened with a revival of *The Haunted Ballroom*, when a young member of the corps de ballet named Margot Fontes danced the child part of young Treginnis. After Alicia's departure, she was to climb slowly but steadily to the position of prima ballerina and be a world celebrity under the name of Margot Fonteyn.

*Lac des Cygnes* was to be Alicia's last major creation for the Vic-Wells Ballet. It was staged on November 20, 1934. It had been last seen in London in its entirety in 1910, the year

of Alicia's birth, when Preobrajenska had danced Odette and Odile at the London Hippodrome.

Sergueff was in attendance again with his precious notebook in which he had jotted down every step and movement of the Maryinsky production. As on so many of the red-letter nights in Alicia's career, a thick fog blanketed both London and the suburbs, but most of her enthusiasts managed to get to the theater to see this culminating triumph of her two years at the Wells.

They had long admired the lyrical tenderness of her Odette, when the second act of the ballet had been presented alone, but now they were amazed by the cold, cruel glitter of her acting and dancing of Odile in the famous Ballroom Scene. She was handsomely partnered by Robert Helpmann, with William Chappell as Benno, into whose arms, one critic said, she fell as beautifully as a flower swaying in the wind.

*The Daily Telegraph* rewarded Alicia with one of her most enviable bouquets by saying: "Last night the role of the Swan Queen was danced with surpassing grace and beauty by Markova. It is to be doubted if it has ever been done more perfectly. Here, indeed, was a legendary creature of another world not subject to the burdensome physical laws of earth."

As with *Giselle*, Alicia has very definite ideas about the manner in which Odette and Odile, the twin roles of this ballet, should be danced.

"In *Giselle*, the acting and the dancing technique go side by side," she explains, "but in *Lac des Cygnes* the dancing rather dominates the characterization.

"That does not mean that Odette cannot be made into a convincing Swan Princess, despite her enchantment. The bal-

lerina must realize that when she makes her first entrance in the White Act of *Lac des Cygnes* as Odette, she is still half-bird and half-princess. It is the hour when she may resume her human form, under the terms laid down by the evil Von Rothbart, who transforms her into a swan by day and allows her to become human at night. It is important to remember that Odette was a swan on the enchanted lake a split second before her first entrance. Her preening movements as she comes on the stage suggest that she is still almost a bird. Her transformation is not complete.

"When she regains her human form I cannot imagine why so many ballerinas dance the part like tragedy queens. Odette is happy, with the entire night before her. She has several hours of leisure before she is transported back to the lake in the guise of a swan. Not being accustomed to seeing human beings in her quiet retreat, she is naturally on her guard and begs that her life may be spared.

"In the Ballroom Scene, as Odile, the evil Von Rothbart's daughter who is masquerading as Odette, the ballerina must avoid heavy, dramatic acting if she is to put on a convincing performance. If the Prince is to be fooled and mistake Odile for Odette, then they must surely resemble each other. The Prince, who was attracted by the gentle, lyrical Odette, will not be deceived by Odile if she looks unlike his Swan Princess. Odile must dance with him, more or less as Odette danced with him on the lakeside. There should be only a flash of evil visible when she is near Von Rothbart. She is there to charm the entire Court, and the hardness of her character must be expressed by the dancing and not by behavior which destroys the subtle characterization of the legend."



By this time Alicia had put British Ballet well and truly on the map in London. Nothing could give a better picture of her position than a few lines of editorial matter which appeared in the London *Evening News* on March 27, 1935.

### WILD ENTHUSIASM FOR MARKOVA BALLET THAT WOULD MAKE A FOREIGNER GASP

If you want to see a packed theater and an audience beside itself, go to Sadler's Wells on any ballet night, especially a night on which the prima ballerina is Alicia Markova. Last night was typical. Markova had been on the stage for only a minute or two, dancing with Harold Turner in the *Blue Bird*, when the audience went mad. They had good reason. There may be, and there may have been, better dancers than Markova, but I for one don't believe it.

Alicia had obviously proved that ballet was acceptable to the masses, and Lilian Baylis must have been rather pleased at having had the good sense to give her that extra £5 a week in order to keep her at the Wells. She could easily manage to pay her prima ballerina that fantastic salary of £15 a week out of the house receipts. Less than four years previously Ninette de Valois had nervously but courageously staged her first ballet program, in which I took part, at the Old Vic. Now, thanks largely to Markova's magic, ballet nights meant capacity houses.

It was a wonderful achievement to have staged full-length versions of *Giselle*, *Casse Noisette*, and *Lac des Cygnes*, and to be able to claim them all as box-office winners.

The Vic-Wells still held their own, even when Colonel de Basil staged spectacular ballet seasons every year at Covent

Garden with Danilova, Baronova, Riabouchinska, Toumanova, Massine, and Lichine in the company. Markova still drew her admirers to Sadler's Wells, where there was no falling off in the box-office receipts. British Ballet had taken root, and was determined to flourish.

The success of the Vic-Wells Ballet and Markova was beginning to reach the West End of London. Vivian van Damm, manager of the Windmill Theatre, was persuaded by Alicia's sister Doris to pay a visit and see Alicia and the company dance. A full house and tumultuous enthusiasm met his eyes and ears and he realized that here were possibilities of which advantage could be taken.

The outcome of Vivian van Damm's interest in the ballet was an agreement to tour the Vic-Wells Ballet during the summer of 1935. A short season was scheduled at the Wells during the latter half of May, under the auspices of Vivian van Damm, Mrs. Laura Henderson, and Alicia.

Lilian Baylis was only too happy for the tour to be arranged in association with her, as long as she was not expected to furnish any money. Mrs. Henderson had to finance the expense of taking a company of forty-five dancers on the road, with Constant Lambert as the conductor. The company was the greatest triumph to date for British Ballet, as every member was British-born. In addition to Alicia and myself, the principal artistes were Ninette de Valois, Ursula Moreton, Beatrice Appleyard, Harold Turner, Walter Gore, and William Chappell.

History was made during the farewell season at the Wells by staging the first all-British ballet—*The Rake's Progress*.

This ballet, with music by Gavin Gordon, choreography by Ninette de Valois, and décor by Rex Whistler, depicts

the road to ruin in balletic terms and was inspired by the Hogarth drawings in the Soane Museum in Lincoln's Inn Fields. It was essentially British in style and atmosphere, danced by an all-British cast, with Alicia as the Betrayed Girl, Walter Gore as the Rake, Harold Turner as the Dancing Master, and Ursula Moreton as the Lewd Dancer in the Orgy Scene.

No ballet was a more complete product of the Vic-Wells organization, as the dresses were made in the workroom, and the miniature fiddle used by the Dancing Master was discovered in the nearby Caledonian Market, after a search of the leading West End music shops had failed.

Ninette's choreography translated Hogarth's pictures into movement. She was not afraid of the painter's realism or the truths about the town life of the period as lived outside the fashionable houses. No attempt was made to refine the horrors, and it was obvious from the first performance that this low-life romp would become a classic of British Ballet.

For a prima ballerina, Alicia accepted a very small part as the Betrayed Girl. Her chief dance was executed on a narrow strip of stage in front of the act drop, but she brought impeccable virtuosity and a wonderful sense of character to the part. The pathos of the last scene, wherein she visits the inhabitants of Bedlam, was something to haunt the memory.

After seeing it, Herbert Farjeon said that Alicia was the greatest dancer of our time. *The Daily Sketch* seemed a little anxious about Alicia's physique when the critic wrote: "Markova, as the Betrayed Girl, was her exquisite self—a delight—but one wishes for her art's sake that she would eat a dozen steaks a day."

Ninette de Valois came into her own as a choreographer,

for she proved then that British Ballet was really worth watching and something to write about abroad.

The night of June 1st marked the end of this short but dazzling season; it also marked Alicia's last night at the Wells. She was now going out into the world to conquer larger fields after proving that she could more than hold her own with foreign ballerinas in the great classic roles, and after demonstrating beyond all doubt that there were audiences for ballet in London. She had watched them grow in numbers from 500 to 2,000 a performance. Her faith had been rewarded.

Her bank balance may not have increased to any considerable degree, but she had gained infinite satisfaction from watching young dancers improve from week to week until the company had become a team of which she could be proud. In the beginning there was no time to wait for dancers to attain anything like perfection before they were seen by the public, and in many cases they were cast as soloists while still working hard to improve their technique.

That remarkable reign of Alicia's as *prima ballerina assoluta* at the Wells, from the autumn of 1933 to the May of 1935, had been well worth while. A house packed to suffocation was to thank her on that glorious June 1st. They shouted for a curtain speech, and for the first time Alicia spoke from the stage. With a nervous smile on her lips, she said quite simply, "Thank you all from the bottom of my heart."

About four hundred people were standing that night, and the air was charged with an excitement that had to be experienced to be understood. Alicia received a mountain of flowers, ranging from gigantic gilt baskets of roses to simple

little bunches of violets from her devoted gallery admirers. She had to hire three taxis to take them home.

I joined the company during their second week at the Wells, and then it was decided to give eight special performances at the Shaftesbury Theatre in the West End before opening the tour at Blackpool on the following Whit Monday.

When we moved on to Blackpool for this first Vic-Wells tour of the provinces we took a company of fifty, with an orchestra of forty. Our repertoire included *Giselle*, *Lac des Cygnes*, *Casse Noisette* (Act III), *Les Sylphides*, *The Haunted Ballroom*, *Job*, *The Jar*, *Les Rendezvous*, *Spectre de la Rose*, and *Blue Bird*.

Now that the company was dancing every night of the week, instead of giving only a couple of performances, as had been the custom at the Wells, Alicia naturally could not take all the leading parts every night, so other dancers were given a chance; one of these was fifteen-year-old Margot Fonteyn, who danced Alicia's part in *The Haunted Ballroom* from time to time. She had already been taking a great interest in this girl, and I remember them dancing together in *The Lord of Burleigh* earlier in the year.

The house gave Margot a warm reception and, as the curtain rose and fell it was Alicia who whispered hurried instructions to her on how she should take her call.

This first Vic-Wells tour was the most important ballet event in the provinces since the death of Diaghileff. Our contact with out-of-town audiences left the local critics quite at a loss for words. They had never seen any stage performance to compare with such well-danced ballet, and they were be-

wildered when they sat down to tell their readers about it.

One critic wrote: "Markova—she is moonlight on a rippling stream, she is the wind stirring the pine trees, ruffling the golden tops of the corn, she is thistledown blown from the lips of a child. Or, if you like this metaphor better, she makes the average tap dancer look like a centipede with sore feet."

It was the same everywhere. In Glasgow Alicia and I had to write a letter of thanks to the press to convey our gratitude to the people of that city. In Manchester there were frenzied scenes such as had never previously been witnessed at the Opera House while wave after wave of applause was accompanied by stamping and cheering. The press said that one had only to see the audience greeting Markova, as the curtain fell, to realize that the age of miracles was still with us.

It was at this time that the *Manchester Guardian* wrote about *Giselle*: "It is not necessary to say that Markova is a dancer of very great genius, and yet the scene in which she realizes, as the program charmingly phrases it, that 'she has bestowed the fullness of her virgin love on one who can never be hers,' and goes quietly and convincingly mad, owes less to her dancing than to her acting. Markova, one thinks, could be a great Ophelia, without a movement of her body. And yet it is precisely because she made her body reproduce a lifeless travesty of the dance she had so bewitchingly executed with her lover ten minutes before that she achieved her effect."

Success was not confined to the provinces. The British company were beginning to hold their own with the visiting ballets from abroad. When the De Basil Company gave their London season that summer, Riabouchinska and Guerard

in the Blue Bird pas de deux were compared with Markova and Harold Turner. The British dancers were definitely better. So we were catching up. It was something to know that this progress was receiving public recognition.

Encouraged by the financial success of the Vic-Wells tour, the overwhelming enthusiasm for ballet in the provinces, and the promise of financial support from Mrs. Laura Henderson and Vivian van Damm, we thought seriously of forming our own company in the autumn. Britain was obviously becoming ballet-minded and we saw no reason why we should not take advantage of the pioneering seeds we had already sown.

Ninette de Valois was perhaps sorry to lose us, particularly Alicia; she probably wondered how Sadler's Wells would get on without Alicia to guarantee a full house at each performance, but she was generous enough to express a certain satisfaction at realizing that there was now sufficient response in Britain to support two ballet companies. Five years previously there had been no British Ballet at all. Ninette had trained six girls to make some sort of show in the opera ballets. From this humble beginning the Vic-Wells had grown into an enterprise running regular ballet performances in London for eight months of the year.

At one moment it looked as though we would both return to the Vic-Wells Ballet for another year as full-time artistes of the company. They needed Alicia and they needed me, as Robert Helpmann had accepted an engagement in a revue at the Adelphi Theatre. This revue, however, had not turned out to be the success for which he had hoped, and Bobby was quite willing to return to the fold from which he had strayed for a brief moment.

As Ninette allowed Helpmann to return to the company, she did not need me but she did want Alicia. However, Alicia and I had a gentleman's agreement with Laura Henderson and Vivian van Damm that we would remain together, either with the Vic-Wells Company, where we expected to dance for at least a year or, failing that, in a company of our own.

And so the Markova-Dolin Ballet came into existence.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

# THE MARKOVA-DOLIN BALLET



THERE was a great deal of excitement that autumn of 1935 as Alicia and I worked together on the formation of the Markova-Dolin Ballet Company, which was to be our sole interest for the next two years.

We recruited forty dancers, who were all British artistes of considerable promise. Apart from ourselves, the soloists included Wendy Toye, Prudence Hyman, Molly Lake, Kathleen Crofton, Beatrice Appleyard, Diana Gould (now Mrs. Yehudi Menuhin), Algeranoff, Frederick Franklin, Travis Kemp, Guy Massey, and Keith Lester. Our musical director was Leighton Lucas.

The repertoire, of which a new company might well be proud, included three fine new works—*David*, a Biblical ballet written for me by Poppoea Vanda, with a much-discussed act drop designed by the famous Jacob Epstein; *Aucassin and*

*Nicolette*, the first ballet ever created for Alicia and me, with choreography by Wendy Toye, music by Josef Holbrooke, and décor by Motley; and *Show Folk*, a burlesque of the circus by Susan Salaman with story and décor to some of Offenbach's gayest melodies.

These were our favorite new creations, and they were backed by a good solid selection from the classics and some attractive *divertissements*. The classics included *Giselle*, *Lac des Cygnes*, *Les Sylphides*, *Carnaval*, *Casse Noisette*, *Hungaria*, *The Nightingale and the Rose*. The *divertissements* were *Espagnol*, *Rose Adagio*, *Bolero*, *Water Lily*, *Pas de Quatre*, *Hymn to the Sun*, and *The Blue Danube*. Later, when Nijinska joined the company as our ballet mistress, she revived for us her two famous ballets, *The House Party* and *The Beloved One*.

We opened at Newcastle on November 11, 1935, with *David* as the eagerly awaited new offering, *Carnaval* and *Casse Noisette* completing the triple bill. It is a great pity that Epstein's powerful act drop which he painted himself, was his first and only work for the theater, as his bold style is admirably suited to the medium of theatrical décor.

The Newcastle opening was a heartening experience. Alicia won a tremendous ovation. The critics went into raptures over her elfin grace and said that not since the death of Pavlova had the city seen ballet in its true and colorful perfection.

In Nottingham the house was sold out night after night.

We staged the première of *Aucassin and Nicolette*, a thirteenth-century troubadour's tale, in Liverpool. Eighteen-year-old Wendy Toye choreographed the ballet after read-

ing a translation she had picked up in a secondhand bookshop in the Charing Cross Road. Motley, who created the scenery and costumes in exquisite pastel shades, was obviously inspired by Froissart's *Chronicles* and the Bayeux Tapestry. The ballet remained one of the most popular items in our repertoire throughout our company's existence. It was a simple love story, delicately expressed and enchantingly staged.

At the end of 1936 Vivian van Damm and Mrs. Laura Henderson took the Duke of York's Theatre for a year, with the idea of making it a center of British Ballet. We staged a Christmas season, with an opening bill consisting of *Show Folk*, *Lac des Cygnes*, and *Casse Noisette*. The press hailed the standard of the company as the finest attained by any British ballet to date. London audiences were very proud of Alicia. She was British. They had seen her grow up, artistically, since her student days. Other fine dancers had come to London ready-made, but in Alicia's case they had watched her striving for perfection and eventually attaining it. She never seemed stale, but somehow managed to recapture the emotion at each and every performance.

*The Spectator* paid a tribute to Alicia at this time which is worth quoting:

"As a dancer, Miss Markova approaches nearer to the thistle-down lightness of Pavlova than any other I have seen. She does not quite achieve that appearance of magic detachment from the earth which made you wonder by what effort of will Pavlova forced her toe to touch the boards at all. But her exquisite performance in *Les Sylphides* was a good approximation to that ethereal defiance of the laws of gravity."

After the Christmas season at the Duke of York's Theatre we left London and spent practically the whole of 1936 touring the provinces, taking ballet to towns where in many cases it had not been seen for years. We tried to prove that ballet could be an entertainment that everyone could understand and appreciate. We aimed at building up a new ballet tradition with an all-British company possessing a style and individuality of its own. Our programs were designed to give every possible scope to native dancing and talent, and to appeal more widely to the British public than would be possible with some of the works in the Russian repertoire. We avoided anything eccentric, obscure, or ultra-modern, concentrating mainly on the romantic and poetical type of ballet with a good story and plenty of action, easy to follow and like. We made an instant appeal to the man in the street with the poetry and pathos of *Swan Lake* and the dramatic action and glowing pictorial beauty of *David*.

I felt that our audiences took a certain pride in the fact that we were an all-British company. For once native dancers had not been allowed to languish unappreciated and unknown, but were applauded as much as, if not more than, foreign importations.

It was not easy transporting the 1,600 costumes of the Markova-Dolin Ballet round the country. A special pantech-nicon—it became known as the "Markova-Dolin Noah's Ark"—was built to accommodate the costumes, which slid on hanging stands into this gigantic wardrobe. There was less chance of their creasing when transported in this manner. They were under the direction of St. John Roper, who prided him-

self on the freshness of the dresses which never had that tired look so often evident in a theatrical show that has been on the road for a year or more.

We kept a keen eye on our costumes because we wanted to attract people to the theater who were not already balletomanes. We knew that ballet lovers would come in any case, but unless our ballets were well-dressed, we could not expect theatergoers, long used to lavish musical productions, to appreciate them.

The recognition of our work was not confined to the public. There was one occasion when Alicia and I were the guests of the O. P. Club with Madame (now Dame) Adeline Genée in the chair. The dinner was given in recognition of our services to ballet in London and in the provinces.

Madame Genée recalled how, in her heyday, she had asked the management at the Empire for a *danseur* to partner her, instead of the *danseuse en travesti*, which was the custom in Britain at the turn of the century. She was refused because it was declared that the British public considered male dancers effeminate. *We* had advanced beyond that stage. It was now possible for young men in Britain to learn to dance without fear of being criticized.

I remember thanking Laura Henderson on that occasion for giving fifty British artistes guaranteed work for a year on salaries that permitted them to save and continue their studies. She gave British dancers something to work for, apart from music halls and the Russian Ballet companies. By making their lives less precarious she gave them a peace of mind never before enjoyed, and the result was soon apparent in the improved quality of their work.

The ballet boom was at its height in June 1936 when three companies were all flourishing in London at the same time. De Basil was at Covent Garden, Fokine had a company at the Alhambra, and the Markova-Dolin Ballet were at Streat-ham Hill. The three companies danced eighty-one ballets in London during the same week, yet all three theaters were playing to capacity. In the provinces we were still meeting with unparalleled enthusiasm. I remember an audience in Nottingham rising to their feet and cheering, almost as if the incident had been rehearsed. This was audible evidence that the enterprise was proving worth while.

The provincial newspapers also reflected the excitement. A glance at the headlines from the press cuttings of the period reveals such tributes as: "Audience Spellbound by Ballet"—"The Enchanted Hour"—"Markova's Genius"—"Markova the Wonderful"—"Ballet Inspires Audience"—"Ballet's Magic Spell"—"Ballet at Its Best"—"The New Charm of Ballet"—"Markova's Triumph"—"Markova's Magic."

In Glasgow they said that our company was reminiscent of Diaghileff's Ballet at its best. The *Daily Express* wrote: "The ethereal beauty of Markova's movements at times held her audience too spellbound to applaud, but they made up for it later. I lost count of the number of curtains taken at the end of the program."

Slowly but surely we had begun to make the public realize that ballet was not necessarily associated with a Taglioni ballet skirt, but was a form of entertainment that interpreted every mood and catered to every taste. Far from it being high-brow and above the head of the ordinary man and woman, we proved that it could be a richly varied entertainment com-

binning brilliant characterization with elaborate spectacle, melodious music, and even light comedy.

As we could not rent a London theater during the Christmas season of 1936, the company were forced to take a holiday for a few weeks.

Alicia and I accepted an engagement to dance at the London Hippodrome in *Mother Goose*, a pantomime, in which Florence Desmond played Principal Boy and George Lacy was The Dame. We had lots of fun in that pantomime, and no one seemed to enjoy it more than Alicia. She very seldom watched other artists' performances, especially during the show in which she herself was appearing. But this was a complete change. I can still see her in the wings at the Hippodrome laughing loudly and unrestrainedly at George Lacy's antics while he wobbled about on his toes in his burlesque ballet dance.

That engagement was very good for Alicia, and acted on her like a tonic.

After two weeks' rest we rejoined our company for a short spring season at the King's Theatre, Hammersmith. Bronislava Nijinska had been persuaded by us to join our company as *maitresse de ballet*, and to revive two of her great ballets, *The House Party* and *The Beloved One*. Both revivals were a great success for Alicia. In *The House Party* she danced the famous role that had been created by Vera Nemchinova. Her slim little body in its blue, tight-fitting boyish costume made a lovely contrast to the frilly shining tutus that Manya always made for her. *The Beloved One* also gave her a role equally suited to her.

Nijinska created for us two of the loveliest pas de deux

she ever composed. Alicia loved the ballets, and it was very good to have such an authoritative person in charge as Bronislava who was able to take some of the responsibilities off my shoulders.

We gave our season of ballet at the King's Theatre during the Coronation celebrations of His late Majesty, King George VI. The Markova-Dolin Ballet was fast becoming an artistic enterprise and one to be reckoned with. Although there was a bus strike in London at the time of the Coronation, it made no difference to the size of our houses. People walked for miles, and seemed to enjoy the ballets all the more because of the effort they made to see them.

Then, suddenly, tragedy was upon us.

Ten days before our ballet season was to end in London Alicia hurt her foot. It was during the last minutes of *Giselle*. Suddenly, as I was about to lift her, following the support I had been giving her in a series of hops in arabesque, she gasped. "Patté, my foot. It's gone." She carried bravely on in great pain. No one realized what had happened.

The evening ended with a divertissement in which Alicia and I were appearing in the last moments of the Finale. She put on her costume but could barely walk, let alone dance, the few steps that were required for our entrance, so I carried her on my shoulders and waltzed around the stage, filling in the bars of the music. She smiled, used her lovely arms and hands, dancing with them.

I placed her carefully down beside me as we took our curtain calls. The injury to her foot had also jarred her spine. Synovitis symptoms appeared. She was told by her doctor that she must not dance again for some weeks.



In a panic we wired to Paris, and Vera Nemchinova came over by plane, being granted a Labour permit by the Home Office at very short notice.

She saved the situation for us by dancing her original role in *The House Party* and by taking over Alicia's parts in *Giselle*, *Lac des Cygnes*, and *The Nightingale and the Rose*.

Alicia's foot healed during the summer vacation, and she was able to rejoin the company when we opened our provincial tour at the end of the Hammersmith engagement.

This tour proved to be the last undertaken by the Markova-Dolin Company. The curtain fell for the last time at the Theatre Royal, Birmingham, in December 1937, just more than two years after that memorable first night of *David* in Newcastle.

Laura Henderson, who had spent £25,000 on the company, felt that she would have to tighten the pursestrings, so it meant disbanding the company. This does not mean that Mrs. Henderson lost £25,000. She still had the costumes, the scenery, and the performing rights of our extensive repertoire which she presented to me, having such faith in the capabilities and in the future of ballet in Britain.

The theatergoers of the provinces owe Laura Henderson a great debt for the pioneering work she undertook during those early days of British Ballet with the twenty-two works she financed for the Markova-Dolin Ballet. We opened up the road for others who have since triumphed on the same circuit. Now it is possible to take a super-cinema holding 4,000 people and, with the presentation of good ballet, sell out every night for a week. Laura Henderson is largely responsible for this. Her courage and sporting spirit made our

early work possible, though we did not reap the harvest we had hoped for. The expenses incurred in running a full-scale ballet company in those days were even heavier than we anticipated.

Alicia, however, was very much happier at the end of the two years than she had ever been before. She had enhanced her reputation and, like the rest of the company, she was all the better for dancing every night, instead of appearing only a couple of nights a week. Her name now meant something to the general theatergoers of the big provincial cities; her fame was not only confined to the habitués of Sadler's Wells.

When we first went on tour with the Vic-Wells Company I was amazed to discover how little Alicia's name meant even in a city such as Glasgow. As I was dressing to go on the stage for the opening performance at the Alhambra, the manager came into my room. He knew me because I had appeared in his theater with Eleanor Smith's *Ballerina* and Jack Buchanan's *Stand Up and Sing*. "Who is this Markova?" he asked me. "Is she good? What part of Russia does she come from?"

Alicia, of course, had to give only one performance in the theater to leave an unforgettable impression upon the audience and to become the topic of excited conversation throughout Glasgow the next day.

Financially, she was better off than she had ever been, as both she and I received a salary of £40 a week. We had to live in hotels, of course, and keep up a certain standard of living an appearance, but Alicia was as clever as ever at dressing beautifully on a mere pittance.

At the end of the Markova-Dolin Ballet Markova signed with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# PARTNERSHIP



Two years with the Markova-Dolin Ballet meant that audiences in London and all over Great Britain saw Alicia and me continuously together as dancing partners. Neither was seen without the other, and so we became associated in the minds of the public. One cannot think of Romeo without calling Juliet to mind. The mention of Tristan instantly conjures up Isolde.

Ours was the longest of all ballet partnerships, even outstripping that of Karsavina and Nijinsky, but after the dissolution of the Markova-Dolin Ballet our ways parted for a while. Then we were reunited in America during World War II when Alicia joined me in Ballet Theatre with the idea of renewing our partnership and appearing in *Giselle* with me again.

We did not dance together continuously when Alicia first

joined Ballet Theatre, as I was partnering Baronova in a number of ballets while Alicia was dancing a good deal with George Skibine and Hugh Laing. But when Baronova left Ballet Theatre in 1944, Alicia took over her roles in addition to her own, and since that time we have danced together continuously, and almost exclusively, either with ballet companies or in our own dance recitals practically all over the world.

Though Alicia's name has been so closely linked with mine, I suppose she has danced in her time with more partners than any other top-ranking ballerina. In the Diaghileff Company, she danced with Nicolas Efimov, Constantine Tcherkas, Serge Lifar, and Stanislas Idzikowsky. In the Ballet Club performances, when she returned to London, she was partnered by Frederic Ashton, Rupert Doone, William Chappell, Walter Gore, and Stanley Judson. Harold Turner was her partner in *A Kiss in Spring*.

While she was at Sadler's Wells, Robert Helpmann had his first experience of partnering with her in *The Haunted Ballroom*. Apart from dancing with me in the Markova-Dolin Ballet, she was Frederick Franklin's partner when he danced his first leading roles, taking over from me Aucassin in *Aucassin and Nicolette* and sometimes the Blue Bird pas de deux.

When Alicia joined the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo under the artistic direction of Massine, she appeared with Lifar and Franklin again, as well as with Michel Panaieff, Roland Guerard, Marc Platoff, Igor Yousekevich, and André Eglevsky.

Apart from our own close association in Ballet Theatre,

Alicia danced with George Skibine, who gained his first chance of partnering her by appearing with her in *Bluebeard*, *Les Sylphides*, and *Aleko*. Hugh Laing was her Romeo, and Massine took over my part in *Aleko* when I was ill in Chicago. John Kriza also partnered Alicia on a number of occasions. In America, with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, she was partnered by Igor Yousekevich in *Rouge et Noir*. In other ballets her partners were Oleg Tupine, Luis Trapaga, George Zoritch, and Leon Danielian.

In view of the unique length of our own partnership, it is astonishing to observe so many other dancing partners in the record of Alicia's career.

When I sit down and count my blessings I give a rather special thought to the stroke of good fortune that guided Alicia across my path and linked us together as dancing partners. We were so well suited from a physical appearance point of view; also we were pleasing to look at when dancing together in a pas de deux.

I think that the *danseur* should have a more mature quality to enable him to show off the *danseuse* to better advantage. He must stand firmly on his two feet in readiness to support her when she is on one *pointe*, and therefore he should never appear slimmer or younger than the ballerina. Alicia and I each looked our best when we were seen together, as our weight and stature were so admirably balanced. Alicia must always choose her partner with care. Beside the more robust André Eglevsky she looked so like a wraith that the audience who should have been admiring the beauty of her work were too often concerned about her delicate appearance.

The success of our partnership was due just as much to

our mental outlook as to our dancing technique. On the stage we had a similar mental approach to our work, but away from the theater no two people could be more dissimilar. While Alicia took her relaxation quietly at home, I preferred to mix with people in as many different walks of life as possible and, according to Alicia, "doing all the things a dancer should not do," such as smoking to excess and attending too many late-night parties. As it was, we were both tolerant of each other. I should have been bored if I had lazed about as much as she did in her leisure hours, and she would have been worn out if she had attempted to keep pace with my social life.

I like theater people and Alicia undoubtedly enjoyed meeting them through me. I introduced her to Beatrice Lillie, Constance Collier, and Ethel Barrymore.

More than one critic hailed our partnership as perfect. I think the secret lay in the fact that we were both so aware of each other during every moment we were on the stage. Our strength lay in our union. We were constantly concerned about each other and interested in each other. I was conscious that Alicia was watching me to see what was happening, and she knew that I always had my eye on her. We were both working for the same end, and therefore there was never any suggestion of rivalry or jealousy in our artistic relationship.

Such jealousy was a failing of the peerless Pavlova. She frequently changed her partner. Mordkin, Volinine, Novikoff, and Vladimiroff all had their reign; so did Nijinsky. She is said to have danced with Nijinsky only once. The ballet was *Giselle*, and he was so phenomenally successful in the second act, when their chances were more or less equal, that Pavlova refused to appear on the same stage with him again.

It was left to Karsavina to complete the historic partnership and to leave an unforgettable record of their association.

I enjoyed so much presenting Alicia in an adagio that we have been told that we gave the impression of two people in love. We were certainly both in love with the same art, and to me, when dancing with her on the stage, no other woman mattered, or could matter, in my life. That was what I tried to convey to the audience, and it is something which should be the proud privilege of anyone who has the honor of dancing with Markova.

Alicia and I have danced the same classic pas de deux hundreds of times, and yet every time I made my entrance in *Casse Noisette* or *Les Sylphides* I felt that I was about to partner her for the very first time. The classics never grow wearisome because they are capable of such different interpretations. Alicia's performances of the same role were apt to vary. For instance, she might alter the speed of a pirouette, which brought a new excitement to the dance and kept it alive and fresh, therefore it was essential that the ballerina have a permanent partner, capable of dealing with the situation and ready for any emergency.

No one could wish for a more versatile partner than Alicia. She was reminiscent of Olga Spessiva, whose work always left me speechless with admiration, but she had a far wider range than Spessiva ever had. From the classicism of *Giselle*, Alicia wandered through the melodrama of *Aleko* to the saucy humor of Freddie Ashton's *Façade*, brilliant in every one. Furthermore, she had such magnetism on the stage that she could hold an audience spellbound with a solo completely divorced from a full-length ballet.

Adeline Genée with her *Hunting Dance* and Pavlova with

her *Dying Swan* were the only two ballerinas capable of rousing a house to frenzied enthusiasm by means of a *pas seul*. Alicia has done the same thing with *The Dying Swan*, as well as with her *Autumn Song* and the *Façade* polka.

If a coat of arms is ever created for Alicia, a clock must figure in the design. Her clock is as indispensable to her dressing room as the make-up box. It stands in front of the mirror at the theater and rules her life from the moment she starts preparing for the stage.

Alicia arrives at the theater at least two hours before the curtain goes up and works to a strict schedule in order to be ready on time. She takes things in a leisurely fashion, as she considers that no ballerina should ever appear flustered, and that it is of the utmost importance that she should make her first appearance in the right frame of mind, either giving herself up to a dreamy Chopin valse or a gay Rossini tarantella. No dancer can hope to dominate her audience if she has to make up in a panic, working against time, possibly adjusting her headdress as she dashes from her dressing room to the stage.

The first fifteen minutes of Alicia's two-hour preparation is devoted to choosing the right slippers for the first ballet. Her feet have moods. They have to be humored, and as no dancer can work unless her feet are happy, choice of slippers needs careful consideration. Alicia has about six pairs in her dressing room, all ready to wear, with the ribbons carefully stitched on by herself. She selects a pair, keeping in mind the ballet to be performed, the amount of technical work it entails, and the stage upon which she has to dance.

The next fifteen minutes is occupied in getting out of her



everyday clothes, settling down comfortably in a dressing gown, and collecting all the essential make-up paraphernalia about her. It takes her about forty-five minutes to make up. She works on her face with the exquisite care of a miniature painter, but that does not mean she creates an elaborate mask of make-up. She is horrified by the modern tendency of dancers to plaster make-up on their faces, producing grotesque masks with purple lips and jade eyelids.

Alicia maintains that the dancer should make herself look as attractive as possible, always using the contours of her own face as the basis for any artificial mask she may have to devise with grease paint. She uses the minimum of make-up, bearing in mind that while no one sitting farther back than the tenth row of the stalls can see any details of her face, she still has to make an effect on the man or woman at the back of the gallery. Make-up means nothing to them. She realized, even in her Diaghileff days, that she could excite her audiences only by her dancing technique and not by a prettily painted face.

After making up, Alicia slips down to the stage in her practice tights for fifteen minutes of barre exercises to warm up and get her muscles supple in readiness for the first dance. She returns to her dressing room and spends half the remaining time arranging her hair and fixing her headdress. The greatest care has to be taken with this ritual. The headdress has to be firmly but invisibly attached to the hair so that it will not become dislodged. A garland of roses knocked over one eye is enough to kill any romantic ballet.

During the last fifteen minutes Alicia slips into her tights and ties her slippers. When she puts on her costume, she

never sits down. Cleaned and pressed, it must always give the impression of being worn for the first time. "Tired" dresses are an insult to the dancer's audience.

On first nights Alicia gives herself more than two hours. Press photographers may want a last-minute picture, or decisions may have to be made about cuts or entrances as a result of considerations at the dress rehearsal. Allowances must be made for all these demands on her time.

As a ballerina's feet mean everything to her, slippers are a vital consideration. Alicia always wears lightweight slippers with the smallest of blocks, and she never prepares them for the stage by darning the toes. They are little more than gloves on her feet. She believes in the old Italian theory that a dancer's feet should be strong enough to need the minimum of protection in the form of the lightest imaginable slippers. The Niccolini slippers which Nemtchinova used to wear in the *Aurora's Wedding* adagio were so light that they only lasted out the dance. They served her purpose in giving her the support she needed and then were thrown away.

As a child Alicia watched all this, and made up her mind to adopt the same policy when the big roles came her way. Her ideas were strengthened further when she saw Spessiva dancing Giselle in a slipper which lasted for a single performance. Even in the early days Alicia never economized on ballet slippers. She always bought the softest and best she could afford, even if it meant wearing cheaper shoes in the street.

In class she wore only one pair of slippers. Many dancers preferred to change them for pointe work, but Alicia learned to do without changing. As she said, she would be obliged

to restrict herself to one pair during a public performance, and could not hold up the performance while she changed into her "pirouette" slippers, so she might just as well get used to working in the same pair in class.

Like Spessiva, Markova is aloof from her audience. Her remote quality is ideally suited to her roles in romantic ballets such as *Les Sylphides* or the last act of *Giselle*. This was probably responsible for a certain obstinacy which showed itself from time to time in our discussions about our work. She had set ideas about some of her roles and I found it difficult to make her see them in a new light. For years she had danced the Mazurka in *Les Sylphides*. I agreed that she was exquisite in it, but insisted that she would be even finer in the Prelude. She wouldn't listen to me at first, but I was so persistent that eventually she came to the conclusion that I might be right. The first time she danced the Prelude in *Les Sylphides* in New York she literally stopped the show.

Two of the greatest interpretations of music by dancing that I have seen in the past thirty years are Markova dancing the Prelude and Tchernicheva dancing the same solo.

When I first danced with Alicia in our Diaghileff days I found it easy. It was not necessary to turn her; she knew how to hold her breath and not be a dead weight when I lifted her. But there was no excitement in our dancing. With the passing of the years and a wealth of stage experience behind us we gained complete confidence. We had such faith in each other that even a minor disaster seemed out of the question at any performance. There have been moments when our dancing has been touched with a magic which comes to few artists who have not had the good fortune to dance together for thousands of nights.



## CHAPTER NINE

# ABROAD AGAIN



CHRISTMAS, 1937, was not particularly happy for Alicia, as our own Markova-Dolin Company had just been disbanded and she was anxious about her next professional move and the future in general.

We had put the Sadler's Wells Ballet on the map and made the key cities of the English provinces ballet conscious. She had done more for the art of ballet in Britain than any other single dancer at that time, but her reward was not obvious as she sat by the fire on Christmas night and wondered about her future plans. Massine had written to her, saying that he was forming a company in Monte Carlo and would be delighted if she would join it. The contract was not a good one. In any case, Alicia wanted to stay on in England, to do more for British Ballet, which was definitely going to flourish. She had seen it grow from nothing in a mere span of seven years.

She was hailed as the first British ballerina in ballet history. Naturally she was anxious to remain with her own people and to help the ballet in England to secure an international recognition.

She wanted advice. So one evening early in the new year she invited two of her valued friends—Ninette de Valois and Arnold Haskell, who was now recognized as one of our leading ballet critics—to dine at Claridge's. They admitted that she was the finest British dancer, but there was no place for her in her own country. Ninette could not offer her an engagement at Sadler's Wells, where Margot Fonteyn was winning her own public in Alicia's old roles.

Arnold Haskell had never approved of Alicia going to the Sadler's Wells Ballet in the first place. He thought she had "wasted her time dancing in a London suburban theater instead of joining the De Basil Company and appearing with the Russians in the most famous opera houses in the world."

So Alicia's two friends "advised" her to pack her bags and go to America to prove her worth in an international company. She was bitterly disappointed. Her Irish blood rose at the thought that no doors were open to her in her own country, and she vowed that she would make a name for herself abroad. She had an idea that in America she would be accepted as one of the best dancers in the world irrespective of her nationality. What did it matter if an artiste were British, American, German, Russian, Mexican, or an Eskimo if she could dance better than any other ballerina within living memory?

It must never be said that Alicia went abroad and deserted British Ballet in those years when her presence might have

meant so much to it. She left because she was cold-shouldered out of her own country, not because she wanted to go abroad and make a fortune. Money never entered into the question. At that time she would have been far happier dancing at home, with only sufficient salary to cover the rent.

It was just as well that Alicia decided to go abroad. It was a blessing in disguise. Had she been asked to go back to Sadler's Wells, she would have gone like a shot, and she might easily have stayed with them for ten or twelve years. Then she would have missed those wonderful years in America, all those coast-to-coast tours, and the triumphant visits to Mexico, South America, the Caribbean, Honolulu, Manila, and South Africa. She would have reigned at Sadler's Wells and, later, at Covent Garden, when the company made the Opera House their headquarters, but she would not have become the most widely-known ballerina in the world, nor would she have developed as a personality, as she did on American soil.

Feeling somewhat like an exile, Alicia made her way to Monte Carlo to join the new company, known as Les Ballets de Monte Carlo, under the direction of René Blum. Later it became known as Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, when Masine took over the artistic direction. Originally he was *maître de ballet* as well as the leading male dancer.

When the season opened in Monte Carlo, in April, Alicia shared the ballerina roles with Alexandra Danilova. When the company came to London later in the summer it was joined by Tamara Toumanova, Mia Slavenska, and Serge Lifar. Some of the other fine dancers were Nina Tarakanova, Nathalie Leslie (now Krassovska), Nini Theilade, Michel

Panaieff, Roland Guerard, Igor Yousekevich, Frederic Franklin, Jean Yasvinsky, and George Skibine.

That first season in Monte Carlo saw the world première of *Gaieté Parisienne*, in which Tarakanova created the Glove Seller, now one of Danilova's most popular roles. Alicia appeared as the Spirit of the Air in Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony*, which Massine created, with décor by Christian Bérard. She danced with Yousekevich in the Scherzo in which the sunlit atmosphere of Bérard's décor matched the music so perfectly. Previously Massine had mounted ballets on symphonies by Tchaikovsky, Brahms, and Berlioz, but this was his first experience with Beethoven.

Before the company left Monte Carlo, Alicia danced in *Spectre de la Rose* with Yousekevich, in *Les Sylphides*, *Les Elfes*, the Fokine ballet with Bérard décor, and in *L'Epreuve d'Amour*.

In July 1938 the company came to Drury Lane Theatre. On that occasion the *Punch* critic, speaking of Alicia as the Spirit of the Air, said: "Alicia Markova has a special place in the heart of her London public. Her swift, neat movement, her lightness, and her great gift of making the air her own particular element combine to make her the supreme classical exponent of her day."

During this season Alicia appeared in *Giselle*, dancing the part for the first time with a Russian company, with Serge Lifar as her Albrecht.

Markova, back in London, dancing *Giselle*, was enough to pack Drury Lane from floor to ceiling. The vast audience played as vital a part as the dancers on that historic evening when Lifar failed to display the gallantry usually expected



of a *premier danseur*. He was obviously jealous of the tremendous reception accorded to Alicia, which he was determined to share, until the audience made it quite clear, even to him, that they intended to have their own way about it.

I prefer not to give my own description of Lifar's ungallant behavior on this occasion, but to quote Tangye Lean of the *News Chronicle*, who wrote:

"Serge Lifar, specially imported from Paris, seemed more intent on advertising himself than Markova. Markova has been too little visible in this company. Her dancing last evening was so diamond bright and her acting so restrained that she emphasized what London audiences already know, that there is no finer classical dancer in the world.

"She did this against the heavy handicap of a partner whose intensive efforts at feats of elevation and display made anything but a satisfactory background. The performance ended with a campaign waged relentlessly by the gallery to separate Markova from her partner and give her her belated due. After ten ferocious minutes they succeeded. It was nice to be on their side."

Since the days of Edmund Kean the Drury Lane audiences have been proud of having a will of their own; it was good to see them restoring the equilibrium and preventing Lifar from upsetting the balance of the ballet.

When, finally, Alicia stepped out in front of the curtain alone, she was greeted by a roar of applause which was almost terrifying. Just behind the curtain, Lifar was being held back by two male dancers, an incident which was to have spectacular consequences in New York three months later.

Apart from Alicia's dramatic acclamation by her admirers, she was warmly welcomed by the critics who really matter.

Edwin Evans wrote in *Time and Tide*, "There are rare coloratura singers who create the illusion that their florid convention is a natural mode of expression. That is what Markova does with the classical convention on the points—so successfully that when she descends from them it seems a condescension."

When the newly formed Massine Company was giving its season at Drury Lane, the De Basil Company, then called the Covent Garden Ballet and under the direction of German Sevastianov, were giving their season at the famed Opera House. Baronova, Riabouchinska, and Lichine were the stars. September of that year they were to leave for a long tour of Australia; I flew out to join the Company as first dancer, and so our paths were divided by half a world of distance, as Alicia left for America. On the opening night at Drury Lane, Alicia danced with Panieff as her Prince in *Lac de Cygnes* being, as one critic described, "Smothered in well deserved applause and bouquets."

The following morning, during a rehearsal at Covent Garden, Alicia slipped and injured her ankle so badly that she was not able to appear again that season. She didn't dance again until the company opened at the Metropolitan Opera House, in New York, in October 1938.

## CHAPTER TEN

# AMERICA



I AM sorry that I did not partner Alicia when she danced *Giselle* for the first time in America—at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, on October 12, 1938—but I was touring Australia and New Zealand with the De Basil Company. On that occasion Serge Lifar was her Albrecht, with Marc Platoff as Hilarion and Danilova as the Queen of the Wilis. Naturally, Alicia was a great success, but had we been dancing together I would never have given Lifar's crude presentation of *Giselle*. His interpolations ruined the continuity of the ballet, which struck New York as being old-fashioned and rather silly. One critic said that the work consisted of "a preposterous mixture of supernatural creatures, mistaken identities, and fabulous improbabilities."

Alicia and I had already proved in our own Markova-Dolin production that, when properly staged and presented, *Gi-*

*selle* could be as moving as any tragedy on the legitimate stage. By clawing the air persistently and tearing non-existent passions to tatters, Lifar tended to overbalance Alicia's performance at her New York debut, so that the beauty of her rendering of her greatest role seemed rather sad and listless. She was acclaimed, but not so wildly as she ought to have been. The New York *Sun* said that "to describe her as a Heifetz among dancers would only approximate the blend of ease, precision, and charm which comprised her individuality." That first performance was not greeted by the hysterical applause which stormed the Metropolitan on later occasions when Alicia appeared with me in the same ballet.

Lifar was very much in the news at that time. When he appeared with Alicia in *Giselle* at the Metropolitan, she injured her foot in the first act so severely that she was unable to dance for two weeks, and Slavenska had to be rushed on to finish the performance. The audience, who had seen a raven-haired Giselle in the first act, were presented with a redhead in the second.

A day or two after that performance Lifar challenged Massine to a duel at dawn in Central Park, Massine, as artistic director of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, was given choice of weapons. Instead of choosing a pistol or a rapier, Massine treated Lifar as a petulant schoolboy, told him to quit talking tommyrot, go home, and take some aspirin! The press revealed that Lifar had objected to the applause given to Roland Guerard after a solo in *Lac des Cygnes*. Lifar insisted that the solo should be cut, but Massine, who had the last word as artistic director, refused to alter the ballet. A deadlock ensued, followed by Lifar's dramatic challenge.

Then Sol Hurok, who was presenting the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, explained that the trouble between Lifar and the management really started at Drury Lane the previous July, after that performance of *Giselle*, when the audience had insisted that Alicia appear alone before the curtain. Lifar had been so infuriated by the ovation given her, and so resented the fact that he had been forcibly held back by two artists in the company, that he bore a grudge against the management.

Hurok, afraid that Lifar might be tempted to sabotage the production by refusing to dance, always had another dancer dressed in readiness to go on if that happened.

When the company landed in New York, Lifar refused to dance with Alicia, insisting that Tamara Toumanova should dance with him. Neither Massine nor Hurok would hear of it, so Lifar walked out of the company and sailed back to Paris, leaving Igor Yousekevich to dance Albrecht to Alicia's *Giselle*.

Alicia danced in *Lac des Cygnes* on the last night of the season and then set off on her first coast-to-coast tour, which covered sixty cities. On the tour she appeared in *Giselle*, *Lac des Cygnes*, *Petrouchka*, *Les Sylphides*, *Les Elfes*, *Blue Bird*, *Coppélia*, *Seventh Symphony*, *L'Epreuve d'Amour* and *Spectre de la Rose*.

Columns were written about the effect Alicia had upon her out-of-town audiences. Perhaps the critic of the *Hartford Daily Courant* spoke for thousands when he wrote: "The best of the new (dancers) is Alicia Markova, the balletomane's dream of beatitude, and of all dancers of the day, the one who owns the copyright on the adjective 'exquisite' as applied to herself and her dancing. Her style is so lyric, her technique

so fine and delicate, and her execution so dainty that you could smash your neighbor's top hat out of sheer excitement."

In Chicago, during December 1938, her critics praised her secure, poised, and delicately precise technique, and were fascinated by her innately reticent personality which never played to the audience, knowing full well that the audience would come to her. The following March she was back at the Metropolitan, celebrating the Silver Jubilee of Sol Hurok, that courageous impresario who had presented Pavlova, Isadora Duncan, Mary Wigman, Uday Shan-Kar, Tetrassini, Elman, Ysaye, Marian Anderson, and Chaliapin to the American public.

John Martin had made up his mind about the greatness of this new ballerina and he paid tribute to her in the *New York Times*. "Alicia Markova in *Lac des Cygnes* is pure poetry. Nor is it alone a matter of mood, for the fine, long line, the miraculously held arabesques, the completely unwavering verticality of her pirouettes in the adagios, and her incomparable lightness could belong only to a classical dancer of the greatest distinction."

Four days later he said: "There are in the company, to be sure, more captivating personalities, for Markova has nothing of the glamour girl about her. What she wins from her audiences is won by her intrinsic gifts as a dancer and not by Hollywood attributes or other subterfuges. To at least one habitué of the ballet, who is weary of the artificial eyelash type of allure, this comes as a blessed relief. Actually, it would be greatly to Markova's advantage if she were to capitalize upon it more, and to adopt a style of complete simplicity even to the point of plainness, for her dancing is most

distinguished when it is most devoid of surface ornament and gratuitous charm."

Thus the discerning eye spotted one of the greatest dancers of all time, but it took Alicia longer than that first American season to become a household word throughout the length and breadth of the United States.

The Ballet Russe gave a Monte Carlo season in the spring of 1939, when *Rouge et Noir* was staged by Massine, mounted on the Shostakovich Symphony, with Matisse costumes. Markova and Yousekevich danced the Man and Woman, with Plattoff, Franklin, and Panaieff in the cast. A June season followed in Paris at the Palais de Chaillot, and in July Alicia slipped over to London to dance in the Faust ballet at the Albert Hall, at a charity concert at which Alfred Piccaver sang. Later that month she appeared as La Camargo in a show given at the Westminster Theatre by the Production Club of the Royal Academy of Dancing.

I came back to England in August, fresh from my wanderings with the De Basil Company, and joined Alicia for one or two dance recitals in Harrogate and Brighton. She was looking forward to an autumn season at Covent Garden when she hoped to surprise London with her dramatic dancing in *Rouge et Noir*, which was to be the novelty of the opening night.

The curtain never rose on that season, as World War II broke out the previous day. All theaters in London closed their doors, fearing the devastating air raids which, we were warned, would arrive at any moment.





## CHAPTER ELEVEN

# WAR YEARS



DURING those early days of September 1939 everyone walked about London with one ear on the air-raid sirens, expecting to be blown to pieces any minute. Alicia naturally wanted to be with her family and share whatever fate lay in store for them, but she was under contract to Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and was expected back in New York for their autumn season. She had no alternative but to go, and so made preparations to sail on the S.S. *Washington* on the last day of September.

I was going to America, en route to joining the De Basil Company on another tour of Australia. Mrs. Marks was heartbroken at the idea of her daughter leaving England, but when I promised I would take care of her, she consented to let her go, comforted by the knowledge that Alicia and I would be together.

The S.S. *Washington* appeared to be carrying a whole cargo of famous dancers, including Danilova, Baronova, Paul Petroff, Gerry Sevastianov (Baronova's husband), as well as three British dancers, Andrée Howard, Antony Tudor, and Hugh Laing; the last three were going out to join a new American company, Ballet Theatre, which was just being formed with the financial backing of Lucia Chase.

Though none of us knew it at the time, Alicia was to spend eight years in America, and during that time she was to be transformed from the quiet ballerina of British Ballet into a glamorous international star of the dance, with a personality of her own, the center of attraction at all the social gatherings to which she was invited.

During those eight years she was to dance the length and breadth of America—first as one of the ballerinas of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, later with Ballet Theatre, and, finally, with the small company created for us by Sol Hurok, on dance recital tours which took us thousands and thousands of miles in the United States, Mexico and Central America, to the Caribbean and the Pacific. All this traveling—and the people she met on these journeys—made an entirely new woman of Alicia.

I was thrilled to see this transformation taking place, as in no small measure I was responsible for it. It used to hurt me to see Alicia, after a triumph at the Metropolitan, enter a New York restaurant unnoticed. I wanted people to stop talking and nudge each other as she passed their table and say, "Look, there's Markova!"

During our early days in New York the many parties to which we were asked became something of a nightmare.

Alicia never seemed to be holding her own in the conversation and was a disappointment to people who had been thrilled by her when she was dancing. It was annoying to see these social celebrities deciding that Alicia was a rather dull and ordinary person. But as she scarcely opened her mouth in their presence one could hardly blame them for coming to this conclusion.

When people were introduced they would gush over her and say, "I thought your performance was divine," or words to that effect. Alicia would smile and assure them that she was glad they had liked it. Then they would invariably ask the name of her favorite ballet. She would tell them that it was *Giselle*. If they tried to pursue the matter further, Alicia would say "Yes" or "No" and that would be the end. Finding it heavy going, they would usually make a polite getaway, and I would discover Alicia left high and dry. She would be occupying the seat of honor, but alone.

I was determined to do something about it so I went to my friend Constance Collier, and asked her to take Alicia in hand. Constance had reigned as successfully in the drawing room as in the theater for more than one generation, so I begged her to try to help Alicia socially. Her first words were, "Whatever shall I talk about?" Obviously, she had had the same reaction as many other people.

However, to please me, she invited Alicia to lunch. They got on wonderfully, and I must say I had not heard Alicia chatter so vivaciously since those days when she sat and talked to her cat in the dressing room at Monte Carlo. A most amazing friendship grew up between the two women and Constance was able to draw Alicia further out of her shell

than any other person I have known. Alicia took to Constance immediately because, as she explained, "She was the first person who did not treat me as a fool. She looked upon me as an individual in my own right, listened to what I had to say, and respected my point of view."

Alicia escaped momentarily from the world of ballet and talked about other things than dancers and slippers, which occupied so much of the conversation when she was with Danilova. She began to realize that a drawing room was very different from a dressing room, where one only exchanged compliments with people who came around after a performance. She found herself surrounded by cultured and interesting people and she noticed that when Constance Collier and Ethel Barrymore met they did not talk about their roles, but about the international news in the daily papers.

Alicia soon saw that she must take an interest in the people about her, discover who they were, what they did in life. They might be more important in the scheme of civilization than she was as a prima ballerina. It was not enough at these parties simply to smile and say "Yes" and "No." She could not go to a reception after a performance at the Metropolitan, and then leave early after having had something to eat at the buffet. She was expected to make some contribution to the evening by entertaining those guests who had been invited to meet her.

She had always been a listener, but now she learned not only to listen but to show interest in what people were saying, and to carry on an intelligent conversation with the person talking to her.

When Constance introduced her to Charlie Chaplin and

his wife, Oona, it was a great success, because Chaplin loves a good listener and can always feel whether you are concentrating on what he is saying or not. Alicia was an ideal audience for Charlie, who talked a great deal about matters very dear to him.

Alicia began to appreciate now that criticism meant nothing in the making of a world personality. It was useless to have volumes of press cuttings saying that you are a heaven-sent *Giselle* if you have nothing to say for yourself when you meet people. It is you yourself who count if you are to make an impression as an international figure in the world of art or in any other sphere. That is one of the truths that Constance impressed upon Alicia during their many happy meetings together.

As a result of all this Alicia acquired an individuality that compelled attention in a quiet manner. She became equal to any occasion, mastering every situation with dignity touched with charm.

Eighteen months were to elapse before Alicia and I danced together in New York. Soon after the S.S. *Washington* docked, Colonel de Basil released me from my Australian contract with him, and I signed up as premier danseur with Ballet Theatre. Alicia started immediate rehearsals with Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo for their opening at the Metropolitan. Mia Slavenska danced in *Giselle* to a packed house, but I gathered that a large proportion of the tickets had been given away. When Alicia made her appearance in the same ballet a few nights later, with Igor Yousekevich as Albrecht, the vast theater was half-empty. I suspected intrigue and wished that Alicia and I had been members of the same com-

pany, so that I could have kept a closer watch on things and taken some hand in fighting her battles. In eighteen months my wish came true.

While Alicia was appearing in New York and in the key cities of America with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, I was dancing with Ballet Theatre, having made my debut with them as Albrecht in my own production of *Giselle* in January 1940, with Annabelle Lyon in the title role.

Alicia Alonso, Muriel Bentley, John Kriza, and Jerome Robbins became members of the company.

In the autumn of 1940 we gave a season in Chicago. Alicia was in Detroit with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. This meant that she was near enough to come over and see some Ballet Theatre performances. Her contract with the Ballet Russe was nearing its end, and I was anxious that she should join Ballet Theatre and dance *Giselle* as it should be danced in a production worthy of her brilliance. Impressed by our work, I was able to persuade her to join us, though it was not until the following summer of 1941 that she signed the contract.

Before the autumn season opened Alicia and I ran a summer school at Ted Shawn's farm, Jacob's Pillow, where the Ballet Theatre Company were given full board and lessons. Alicia had the job of catering for a hundred people. This enterprise of ours—the running of the school, the lessons, and the lectures that were given by guest teachers—kept the company together during these summer months.

I shall always remember the superb open-air performance Alicia gave of *La Sylphide*, a pas de deux in the style of the old Taglioni ballet, which we performed against the slender silver birch trees in the woods near Jacob's Pillow.

Hurok decided that Ballet Theatre should open their autumn season in Mexico City where the new works could be tried out before they were seen on Broadway. Markova and Baronova were the ballerinas of the company, which included Lucia Chase, Annabelle Lyon, Nora Kaye, Karen Conrad, Rosella Hightower, Hugh Laing, Antony Tudor, George Skibine, Ian Gibson, and myself.

On the opening night in Mexico City *Giselle* was a sensation. One of the leading local critics wrote: "Markova brought to it all that genius and breath-taking beauty, lightness and quality which today have become a legend."

Not only Mexico City but New York City became fully alive to the glory of Alicia's *Giselle*, to quote John Martin's tribute in the *New York Times*. "As *Giselle*, she gave such a performance as balletomanes dream about seeing in some distant realm of perfection, but never really expect to see. . . . Not only does she dance the role with exquisite precision and incredible lightness, but she plays it with such imagination and style that, stilted and old-fashioned as it is dramatically, it becomes both believable and moving. Truly here is the first ballerina of her time."

On another occasion he said: "She has both elevation and extension in an extraordinary degree; she is uncannily balanced, she has speed, a steely strength, impeccable precision, a feeling for the rhythmic phrase, and all without a sense of strain. An exquisite quality of suspension pervades all her aerial movements."

During the Mexico City season Alicia gave me enormous pleasure by impersonating Taglioni in my *Pas de Quatre*, a work for which we both have a great affection. I had always wanted her to dance in this ballet, as she was the most obvious

ballerina in all the world to emulate the style of the ethereal Taglioni. She had read a good deal about the ballet in Mr. Beaumont's back room, and as we had spent many hours discussing it, perhaps I may be forgiven if I wander back a century to recall the original production, with one or two extracts of eyewitness accounts from London newspapers of the day.

In the year 1845 Benjamin Lumley, the director of Her Majesty's Theatre in London, conceived an ambition to see the four greatest dancers of his time—Marie Taglioni, Fanny Cerito, Carlotta Grisi, and Lucille Grahn—appear together in the same ballet. By some miracle, he succeeded in persuading these four temperamental stars to do so. He commissioned the music for a new *divertissement* from Césaire Pugni, in whose ballet, *Eoline*, Lucille Grahn had made her London debut on the opening night of the season, and Jules Perrot to do the choreography.

Discussing Perrot's tricky task, Lumley reflected, "Every twinkle of each foot in every *pas* had to be nicely weighed in the balance, so as to give no preponderance. Each danseuse was to shine in her peculiar style and grace to the last stretch of perfection; but no one was to outshine the others—unless in their own individual belief."

Trouble arose as to the order in which each danseuse should perform her *pas*. The place of honor, the last, was unanimously granted to Taglioni, but the others claimed equal rights, and neither would appear before the other. A deadlock developed, but finally, with a stroke of diplomatic genius, Lumley decreed, "Let the oldest take her unquestionable right to the envied position." What could be fairer?



The ladies smiled in confusion, and seemed at a loss for words. So Perrot stepped in, and the management of the affair was left in his hands.

The *Pas de Quatre* was first danced on July 12, 1845, between the acts of Donizetti's opera, *Anna Bolena*. It was repeated on three other occasions. The third performance, on July 17, was given in the presence of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.

*The Times* of July 14 referred to the *Pas de Quatre* as "the greatest terpsichorean exhibition that ever was known in Europe—we repeat the phrase—that ever was known in Europe. Taglioni, Cerito, Carlotta Grisi, and Lucille Grahn were all combined in one *pas de quatre*, and such a combination was altogether unprecedented, nay, might have been declared impossible. For secret history will ooze its way even through the pores of a curtain, and then do we learn that these ethereal-looking creatures whom mortals call danseuses, and who appear to live solely for the purpose of floating, bounding, and smiling in an atmosphere perfumed by the bouquets of admirers, are not remarkable for love toward each other, and that the task of getting four of them into one *pas* supposes a power of persuasion and argumentation bordering on the preternatural.

"There is not the slightest doubt that even at half-past ten o'clock on Saturday night there were many sundry skeptics who believed that the announced *pas* would never take place, who thought that the words in the bill were merely some *lusus typographæ* without real signification or at any rate that some unlucky apple of discord would be thrown among the fair party, creating a sort of centrifugal force which would

render futile all attempts to regather the fragments of the annihilated *pas*. Certainly people had seen a *pas de deux* by Elssler and Cerito, danced amid an enthusiastic warfare that threatened to revive the blue and green factions of the Hippodrome, but then—how great the difference between two and four! For the difficulty in these cases does not merely progress in the geometrical ratio of the number of artists, but must be estimated by squares, like the velocity of falling bodies.

“Therefore, we say, when the curtain rose for the impossible *Pas de Quatre*, and the marvelous four entered all in a line, hand holding hand, as a testimony of amity, the house burst forth into a tumult, not only of admiration, but of amazement. There was the problem visibly solved—the feat that was manifestly impracticable was accomplished—Columbus had placed the egg erect. All came forward and curtsied—and then, what a portentous pause! The audience were all in expectation as to what would happen under circumstances so unparalleled, and the partisan feeling doubtless worked high in many a bosom! A large shower of yellow papers descended into the pit, apparently from the gallery slips, but whether these contained an epic poem, an ode, or a pastoral drama, in honor of the occasion, we are unable to say, not having had the felicity to catch one.

“The slow movement of the *pas* began, and the four ladies formed in a series of groups, matchless for taste and elegance, Taglioni usually occupying the central position. Then came the quick movement with the variations—by the way, do our readers know why the steps which each danseuse executes *sola* in the course of a grand *pas* are called ‘variations’? If

they do, they are better informed than we are. Then, we say, came the variations—and here was the period for the greatest excitement, now was the question to be decided how each would put forth her strength.

“Taglioni displayed all her commanding manner, relying much on that advancing step, of which we believe she was the inventor, and astonishing by some of her bounds. Lucille Grahn, a disciple of the same school, danced with a breadth and vigor which showed a determination not to be outdone by her elder competitors. Cerito entered into the contest with that revolving step which invariably delights; and Carlotta Grisi, forming a striking contrast, gave a piquant, coquettish sort of variation with her wonted fascination.

“Perrot, the inventor of this wonderful *pas*, conducted it at the wing, and might be seen from the left side of the house. The exertions of the danseuses were certainly equaled by his own. He beat time, he fumed, he fidgeted in an agony of zeal, the weight of his own work being heavy to bear. Never was such a *pas* before. The excitement which a competition so extraordinary produced in the artists roused them to a pitch of energy which would have been impossible under other circumstances, and hence every one did her utmost, the whole performance being a complete inspiration.

“We shall not say one word as to which we think the best, or the second best—not one word tending to dissolve the harmony that has resulted in so wonderful an exhibition. All did admirably—none left anything to desire. The manifestation of enthusiasm on the part of the audience was scarcely less remarkable than the manifestation of energy on the part of the artists. The whole long *pas* was danced to a running

sound of applause, which, after each variation, swelled into a perfect hurricane, the furore of partisanship being added to the weight of general admiration.

"Bouquets flew from every point, in immense profusion, as each danseuse came forward, so that they had to curtsy literally in the midst of a shower of floral gifts. Cerito's wreaths and nosegays were more than she could hold in both her arms. Many of the bouquets were demolished by the fall and scattered their particles about, so that the front of the stage was almost covered with flower leaves."

The critic of the *Illustrated London News* wrote on July 19, 1845: "Every other feeling was merged in admiration when the four great dancers commenced the series of picturesque groupings with which this performance opens. We can safely say that we have never witnessed a scene more perfect in all its details. The greatest of painters, in his loftiest flights, could hardly have conceived, and certainly never executed, a group more faultless and more replete with grace and poetry than that formed by these four danseuses; Taglioni in their midst, her head thrown backwards, apparently reclining in the arms of her sister nymphs. . . . No description can render the exquisite and almost ethereal grace of movement and attitude of these great dancers, and those who have witnessed the scene may boast of having once, at least, seen the perfection of the art of dancing, so little understood.

"There was no affectation, no apparent exertion or struggle for effect on the part of the gifted artistes; and though they displayed their utmost resources, there was a simplicity and ease, the absence of which would have completely broken the spell they threw around the scene. Of the details of this

performance it is difficult to speak. In the solo steps executed by each danseuse, each in turn seemed to claim pre-eminence. Where every one in her own style is perfect, peculiar individual taste alone may balance in favor of one or the other, but the award of public applause must be equally bestowed, and, for our own part, we confess that our penchant for the peculiar style, and our admiration for the dignity, the repose, and the exquisite grace which characterize Taglioni, and the dancer who so brilliantly followed the same track (Lucille Grahn), did not prevent our warmly appreciating the charming archness and twinkling steps of Carlotta Grisi, or the wonderful flying leaps and revolving bounds of Cerito. Though, as we have said, each displayed her utmost powers, the emulation of the fair dancers was, if we may trust appearances, unaccompanied by envy.

"Every time a shower of bouquets descended, on the conclusion of a solo *pas* by one or other of the fair ballerinas, her sister dancers came forward to assist her in collecting them; and both on Saturday and on Tuesday did Cerito offer to crown Taglioni with a wreath which had been thrown in homage to the queen of the dance."

I have always been charmed by the lithograph made by T. H. Maguire from the drawing by A. E. Chalon of the four ballerinas in this *Pas de Quatre*, a copy of which used to hang on the wall of my Chelsea studio. One night several friends who had been to the studio to supper were discussing a new purely classical ballet for the Markova-Dolin Company. Various ideas were put forward, when Poppoea Vanda pointed to the lithograph on the wall and suggested a new

ballet, opening and closing with the dancers grouped as in the lithograph. Keith Lester arranged the choreography to the original music which Leighton Lucas orchestrated from documents provided by the British Museum.

*Pas de Quatre* was first danced in Manchester in May 1936, with Molly Lake as Taglioni, Kathleen Crofton as Cerito, Prudence Hyman as Grisi, and Diana Gould as Grahm. It was very well received and became a useful addition to our repertoire, but Alicia never appeared in it at that time.

In 1941 Ballet Theatre asked me to stage it for them. I wrote to Keith Lester asking him to send me his notes, but they were detained by the War Customs authorities, who thought that they were some sort of code message. As they never reached me, I created my own choreography for a première at the Majestic Theatre in New York in February, when Nana Gollner appeared as Taglioni, Katia Sergava as Cerito, Nina Stroganova as Grisi, and Karen Conrad as Grahm.

It was in November of that same year that Alicia first danced Taglioni in Mexico City, with Nora Kaye as Grisi, Annabelle Lyon as Cerito, and Irina Baronova as Grahm. The same four ballerinas enchanted New York with it at the end of the month. After a few performances Baronova, who had been working far too hard, retired from the cast and Karen Conrad again took over her role.

On September 18, 1949, I staged the divertissement for the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo at the Metropolitan Opera House with Alicia as Taglioni, Danilova as Cerito, Krasovska as Grahm, and Mia Slavenska as Grisi. Never have four great dancers worked so magnificently together in an attempt to give us an idea of one of the greatest occasions in

the whole history of ballet. Each one seemed to capture some quality of those four great ballerinas who sent early Victorian London wild with excitement.

Another glorious creation of this period in Alicia's career was her poignant conception of Pavlova's immortal Dying Swan, the most famous dance solo in the world.

Most of us are under the impression that this *pas seul* was created for Pavlova by Fokine on the occasion of a charity matinee at the Maryinsky Theatre in 1905, but Lydia Kyasht in her memoirs claims that she created it. She always told me that it was first danced in public at the Dvorianskoe Sobranie during a matinee given for the benefit of soldiers who had been wounded in the Russo-Japanese War. As she danced, she was accompanied on the cello by Berednikoff, grandson of the Lord Mayor of St. Petersburg. Only later, according to Lydia, did Anna Pavlova dance it in England and other countries outside Russia.

In any case, this dance will always be associated with Pavlova's name. The time came when she dared not leave it out of her repertoire, and though she danced it thousands of times, the applause always lasted longer than the dance itself.

As far back as 1923 Alicia danced *The Dying Swan*. Asta-fieva arranged it for her at that Albert Hall performance when I first appeared as Anton Dolin, but she had not danced it since attaining the rank of ballerina. Indeed, no great dancer had dared to perform it since the death of Pavlova in 1931. Though she was admirably suited for the solo, Alicia would never dance it, because it had become so closely linked with Pavlova. Fokine, however, was so anxious to revive it for Alicia, that finally she consented to do it.

She first danced it at the Boston Opera House on the anniversary of Pavlova's death, but only after Markova's insistence the management agreed to state in the program that the performance was dedicated to Pavlova's immortal memory. Alicia never saw Pavlova dance *The Dying Swan*, so she approached it with an open mind but under the personal direction of Michel Fokine, who created it. The dance has become her own favorite divertissement as well as that of her audiences. It is particularly popular with the younger balletomanes who are now able to get some idea of what Pavlova was like.

Those who have seen both ballerinas, realize that Alicia's interpretation is essentially her own. She has never been content to follow in the footsteps of another. The foundation is always there, of course, but it leaves room for improvisation, and the Saint-Saëns music is the kind that carries the dancer away, according to her mood at the moment. Though the solo lasts only three minutes and consists mostly of bourré-ing on pointes, the body and arms are constantly changing, calling for technical strength from the artist in order to retain her balance.

Alicia always found the dance emotionally exhausting. She would be so out of breath at the end that it took her about five minutes to recover, though actually the physical demands of the choreography are far from heavy. Each performance used to give her enormous satisfaction, if only to feel the reverence with which the audience watched the dance. They seemed to be conscious of the spirit of Pavlova living on in the work of another great dancer who worshiped her and who bears a strange physical resemblance to her immortal predecessor.



Pavlova usually performed *The Dying Swan* against black velvet curtains, but, where possible, Alicia chooses a cyclorama flooded with sky-blue light. The space and simplicity of such a setting seem to intensify the pathos by adding an aching loneliness to the frantic flutterings of a tragic bird, left to die in solitude. For this same reason, the dance is particularly well suited to arena presentations of ballet, and as so much is danced with the back to the audience, the angle of vision is not of particular importance.

No matter where this solo is performed, it evokes pity which frequently draws tears from the spectators. When people went around to see Alicia after a performance, often too moved to speak coherently, she was always amazed by the amount of sympathy a swan could inspire in an audience. The bird had become the symbol of grace in the ballet, which shows how the theater can touch a character with magic and direct an audience's trend of thought. In reality, the swan is a clumsy creation with enormous feet and a mean and vicious nature.

Fokine scored something of a triumph when he persuaded Alicia to dance *The Dying Swan*. When a film was being made during the 1930s, Alicia was invited to impersonate Pavlova dancing at the Palace Theatre on the occasion of her first appearance in London. The promoters of the film were anxious to engage her because of her resemblance to Pavlova, especially in a swan costume, but she refused, saying that it would be an audacity on her part to impersonate so great a dancer. She suggested that they use cuts from a film which Pavlova herself had made, but they considered those early films too crude and dated, and they eventually persuaded Pearl Argyle to play the part.

Had Fokine known about this incident, he might not have had the courage to approach Alicia to dance *The Dying Swan*.

As far as modern ballets are concerned, I suppose Alicia would rate Juliet as her finest creation. Antony Tudor's narrative ballet, *Romeo and Juliet*, based on Shakespeare's tragedy, was first given on April 6, 1943, at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, with music by Frederick Delius and scenery and costumes by Eugene Berman. Hugh Laing was seen as Romeo, Nicolas Orloff as Mercutio, Jerome Robbins as Benvolio, Antony Tudor as Tybalt, Richard Reed as Paris, and Alicia as Juliet.

No one who saw her will ever forget her shyness, as the unspoil child burst in upon the Capulet ball since, for the first time in living memory, one saw a Juliet who "had not seen the change of fourteen years." With shoulder-length reddish hair, this figure of wraithlike fragility looked as truly girlish as Shakespeare meant her to look. She proved as memorable as any of the great Juliets seen on the Broadway stage—and they included such famous actresses as Modjeska, Mary Anderson, Ellen Terry, Julia Marlowe, Eva LeGallienne, Katharine Cornell, and, on the screen, Norma Shearer.

One critic wrote, "Alicia Markova as Juliet is not only the greatest dancer of her time, but also the greatest actress. There is nothing more touching on the stage today than that fatal anguished look cast by Markova as her attendants dress her for the wedding with Paris."

The Balcony Scene was remarkable for a pas de deux in

which the lovers never made contact. Romeo danced in the garden, while Juliet swayed on the balcony above to some of the loveliest music Delius ever wrote. In the Tomb Scene, Markova stabbed herself with her back to the audience, dying with her face on the floor, an effective gesture which "obliterated, with its economy and poignancy, those years of expansive acting that had hovered over the Metropolitan Opera House like a bad dream."

When Antony Tudor set about interpreting Shakespeare's poetry through the medium of the dance, he suggested that Alicia take the text and learn Juliet's part by heart, so that she would understand what his choreography was trying to convey in each successive scene. This she did. Further inspired by the spirit of the Delius music, she created so exquisite a Juliet that the schools of drama in New York sent their students in batches to see her. By miraculously translating inner thought into outward movement she proved how effectively the essential spirit and feeling of poetic drama can be projected over the footlights without using a single word of text.

Diaghileff was always urging the members of his company to visit museums where they could learn so much about the beauty of attitudes and the balance of groupings. When in Italy with the Diaghileff company, Alicia had been fascinated by the Botticelli paintings, and her knowledge of them proved an inspiration during the creation of her Juliet. She based her stance on the figures she had seen in those masterpieces, and not on the principles laid down by the Russian Ballet.

She was so successful that, when Vincenzo Celli and his

wife first saw the ballet, they said they were so carried away that they felt they were back in Italy, and could almost detect the perfume of a flower garden they once loved in Florence.

Markova's name was touched with yet a new magic at this time, when she established an all-time record for ballet at the Metropolitan. For weeks the public refused to allow the last night of the season to be announced. It was postponed and still further postponed until Alicia eclipsed all the previous records set up by Genée, Nijinsky, Karsavina, Pavlova, and Argentina. In short, as John Martin phrased it, Markova was recognized as "the greatest ballerina of history."

## CHAPTER TWELVE

# PIONEERING



ALICIA's triumphs in the early 1940s were not confined to Broadway. With both the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and Ballet Theatre, as well as with our own company afterward, she soon became hardened to the rigors of coast-to-coast touring. She was a born pioneer and gained enormous satisfaction from dancing to audiences who had had rare opportunities of seeing ballet. She remembered our first tours with the Markova-Dolin Company in Britain, and looked upon North America with delight, as another vast world to conquer.

She had the advantage of having Danilova as a companion for her first tour with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo the year before the war. Danilova had been in America for four years before Alicia arrived, so she knew the ropes and was the best possible guide. During that first tour Danilova and Alicia shared rooms in the various hotels along the route,

partly because they enjoyed each other's companionship and partly because accommodation was difficult, as conventions were always being held in the various cities.

When they reached Los Angeles, although the Wine Growers' Convention was in possession of the hotel, they managed to get a room together. Danilova was continually telling Alicia how courteous the American people were to the theatrical profession; they took it as something of a compliment, she said, when great artistes took to the road.

Her claim seemed to be justified when, on the first day, a large basket of fruit was sent to their room.

"Look at this," exclaimed Danilova; "even the hotel manager is anxious to welcome us to the town."

The next day two bottles of wine of a rare vintage arrived. Danilova was even more impressed.

On the third day, at five o'clock, two lovely corsages were delivered.

An hour later two elderly gentlemen called to take them out to dinner. They had mistaken them for members of the convention.

Danilova, with her quick wit, soon took the situation in hand.

"You can have your flowers back," she smiled, "but I fear we have eaten your luscious fruit and drunk your delicious wine. Now, alas, I must go to the theater to dance *Le Beau Danube* and my friend must dance *Swan Lake*. Thank you so much!"

In the old days America saw very little ballet. Fanny Elssler made a triumphant tour, as did Genée and Pavlova in later years. The Diaghileff company paid two visits, but

Nijinsky, rather than the ballet, was the attraction. This meant that there were millions of people in the United States who had never seen a ballet. Pavlova, for instance, did not go to America every year, and then, gave only short seasons, with the rest of the world clamoring to see her. On her American tours she probably averaged one performance in the key cities every three years, which was not very satisfying for those citizens who enjoyed seeing ballet.

Conditions have improved since Markova and Danilova made coast-to-coast tours with a certain regularity. Out-of-town audiences began to know them. They are easily the two best-loved ballerinas in America, and whenever they play a return engagement they are treated like old friends and given a special welcome of their own.

There is no doubt that in the early days Alicia did much to make Americans ballet conscious. It took patience to educate them along the right lines and to resist the temptation to give them what they wanted, in order to win a storm of applause. On the road Alicia danced just as she would in any famous opera house.

On her Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo tours Alicia would usually share the evening with Danilova. She would perhaps dance the White Act of *Lac des Cygnes*, while Danilova would close the evening with *Gaieté Parisienne*. Although Alicia would perform all the real classical dancing of the evening, Danilova would get twice as much applause. Danilova's twinkling legs, her naughty wink, and her saucy smile instantly captured the audience, who yelled themselves hoarse until she came before the curtain.

There was no question of jealousy on Alicia's part. She

knew that would happen. She was determined to go on dancing the classical ballets in their perfection until her American audiences began to appreciate and like the pure classicism of her style.

The next year, when they visited the same town, Alicia might appear in *Coppélia* or *Blue Bird*, so that those of the public who had seen her Swan Queen on the previous visit would get some idea of her versatility. After three or four years she began to receive applause which compared more favorably with that given to later and more popular works. There was not such a gap in appreciation between *Les Sylphides* and *Gaieté Parisienne*.

By her versatility, which ranges from the pure ethereality of *Giselle* to the wild gypsy in *Aleko*, Alicia helped to break down a tendency to type casting in the ballet. Too frequently it is the fashion to type artists in certain roles. If a ballerina scores a triumph as Swanhilda, shall we say, audiences are apt to regard her interpretation of that part as authentic and to expect all other dancers to copy it.

Diaghileff, on the other hand, often assigned major roles in his repertoire to as many as three different ballerinas, who all danced the same part in a different manner, just as Kirsten Flagstad and Jennie Tourel give entirely different interpretations of a Schumann song. Diaghileff never criticized a dancer for not slavishly copying her predecessor in a role. He realized that there was always more than one interpretation of any great choreographic creation, and he would even go to the length of having a dancer's costume altered to suit her interpretation of a part, as happened with Alicia herself in *Carnaval* and other ballets.



American life rather overwhelmed Alicia when she first arrived in the States, and in some aspects it still amazes her. In a community where people read condensed novels because they have not the time to study the detail of the full-length work she felt that they appreciated the outline rather than the detail of ballet. She wondered whether it was possible for artistes to develop as they should in cities where life was lived at such high pressure. How could they possibly find peace and leisure for contemplation in such an atmosphere? She looked back on the Diaghileff days at Monte Carlo when the dancers cut themselves off from big-city life in order to be quiet and think seriously about the parts they were called upon to interpret. The tempo of American life made serious solitary contemplation more than difficult.

Alicia was overwhelmed by the kindness of American friends who called to see her when she was convalescing after an operation. They wanted to bring armloads of books and give her a portable radio. They feared she would be bored if left alone without any sort of diversion. They could not understand her love of solitude or the pleasure she derived from exploring the avenues of her mind in a peaceful, silent room. "There is no shame in being quiet," she would protest. Only one person understood what she wanted. He brought her a ginger kitten one morning. It proved an ideal sickroom visitor, wandering silently about the bed, always eager for a game, and equally ready to take a nap when Alicia felt exhausted. The kitten did far more than a shelf of books or a radio set toward warding off depression and keeping any suggestion of loneliness at bay.

The one-night stands on the coast-to-coast tours proved

grueling for Alicia, when she first experienced them. Nothing like them exists in Europe. In Britain the distances between the big cities are a matter of only a few hours, and the cities themselves are large enough to accommodate a ballet company for a whole week. This means that the dancers can live in a hotel and make themselves at home for a week or longer before they move on to the next place. In America, it is all so different. Only New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco are large enough to permit a ballet company to stay for any length of time. Most of the other cities are visited for only two or three performances, and in many cases for one night only.

It often happened that the dancers did not sleep in a hotel for as long as three weeks at a stretch. They would arrive in a town only an hour or two before the performance, and as soon as the curtain fell they had to dash back to the railway station to their sleeping car and remain on the train until the late afternoon of the following day, when they reached the site of their next performance. After the show, they would make their way back to the station and on again to the next town.

The great danger of such a tour, especially as far as the novice was concerned, was that traveling rather than dancing became the uppermost factor in the artist's life. If that happened, there would be a tendency to walk through performances, with a mind occupied with the ways and means of getting to the station or securing a much-needed hot meal, or even devices for sleeping on the noisy, swaying trains. Many dancers who found it difficult to rest on the train took sleeping pills about an hour before they were due to board the

night train, so that they could be sure of some refreshing sleep. Many an amusing incident has been told of artistes who have taken their pills and then discovered that the time schedule had been altered, leaving them in a state of collapse in the wings or on the station platform.

On the one-night circuits, the ballet companies often presented the same program in every town, with two or three alternate casts. When Alicia was with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo she had to add Swanhilda in *Coppélia* to her repertoire, so that she could dance it every third night. Danilova and Slavenska danced it on the other two. In addition, she alternated with Slavenska in *Casse Noisette*. Alicia danced with Eglevsky, Slavenska with Yousekevich. One occasion, when Slavenska was ill on a one-night-stand tour, Alicia danced in the ballet every night for three weeks, with Eglevsky one night and Yousekevich the next.

Alicia was never at her happiest on these strenuous tours, as she felt that no dancer could expect to give of her very best every night of the week, particularly under such trying conditions, with so much traveling, different orchestras and different theaters every night. In many cases they had to perform in improvised auditoriums on stages which were never meant for ballet and were therefore dangerous, with an oversteep rake. Sometimes the dancers would arrive at the theater with only sufficient time to slap on their make-up, leap into their costumes, and get on to the stage. There was not time to warm up, so their work became doubly difficult.

Traveling in America during the first years of Ballet Theatre was undeniably hard. The trains were always crowded. There were never any reserved seats. The trains left

late and were later still arriving so that we were always anxious about being able to get ready in time for the scheduled rise of the curtain. If we wanted a meal on the train, we had to wait hours. The youngsters in the company who could not afford to buy a meal on the train had to go without food or rely on what they could pick up at refreshment buffets at the station before we started. Hotel accommodations were always difficult. If the performance was being given in an auditorium instead of at a theater, invariably it was situated miles out of town. As it was well-nigh impossible to get taxis back after the show, and with sometimes only an hour in which to catch the train to the next town, it was unpleasant to feel that you were marooned four miles away from the railway station.

I remember one of the Ballet Theatre tours when, for two weeks, our average sleep in bed was three hours a night. But the company were wonderful, coping with that very difficult wartime travel. There was always a smile on most of those tired faces. We were often late starting on our journey, which meant that the audience at the other end had to exercise patience while we changed and rigged up our lighting. The curtain often fell at unearthly hours in the early morning, but we were always given a warm and grateful reception which made us feel that our efforts had been worth while.

One December morning, at three o'clock, to be exact, I recall a group of the world's greatest dancers waiting for a bus to take them to Miami twelve hours away. Alicia was stretched out on the pavement with three overcoats—mine and those of Jerome Robbins and John Kriza—as her mattress, and her own hatbox as a pillow. Next to her, on three

suitcases, lay Jerome Robbins, fast asleep. Antony Tudor, Hugh Laing, Annabelle Lyon, and Nora Kaye were playing some sort of a new card game. Lucia Chase and Irina Baranova joined us after indulging in the luxury of two hours' rest and a wash at the local hotel. Rosella Hightower took John Kriza's dog for a walk, while André Eglevsky went around the company taking candid pictures.

Such were the nights we spent in the war years as we traveled the length and breadth of the United States. I am happy to say, though, that we were never guilty of giving slovenly performances. Nothing would have been more unfair to those balletomanes in vast states such as Texas, where ballet came but one night a year. Surely they deserved the best that we could give after waiting so long.

While she was with Ballet Theatre, Alicia came into her own in America, being greeted with fantastic press notices and wild enthusiasm whenever she appeared. She worked hard under Vincenzo Celli and gave performances with me in *Les Sylphides*, *Lac des Cygnes*, *Giselle*, and *Aurora's Wedding*, the like of which I had never seen before. The settings, the brilliance, and the richness of the costumes equaled those in Diaghileff's production of *The Sleeping Beauty* twenty years earlier. I was thrilled at seeing my *Pas de Quatre* danced to perfection and being demanded everywhere, so that it became quite as popular as *Les Sylphides* on our coast-to-coast tours.

In spite of the endless train journeys, the monotonous meals snatched in coffee shops, and the short stays in hotel bedrooms that all looked alike, Alicia maintained her freshness and kept the magic of the ballet alive, both on the Ballet

Theatre tours and on those later tours when Sol Hurok presented us with our own ensemble in excerpts from the classical and romantic ballets.

In 1944 Alicia added to her professional experience by making an appearance in a Broadway revue. Billy Rose was presenting a show in New York called *The Seven Lively Arts*, for which he was engaging the greatest artists he could find, each a specialist in his own particular branch of the theater.

Meeting Agnes de Mille at a New York première one night, he said to her, "Agnes, who is the greatest ballerina in the world?" Without a moment's hesitation she replied, "Why, Alicia Markova, of course."

"Who is she? What does she look like? Where is she dancing?" was Billy's immediate comeback.

"Well, she's not dancing at the moment. She's here in New York recovering from an operation. Why don't you telephone her at her hotel?"

Billy Rose called Alicia the next day. She telephoned me in Detroit, where I was appearing with Ballet Theatre, to ask me what she should do, and how I felt about her leaving the company and appearing without me in a New York revue.

I told her quite frankly that if she wished to accept an engagement with Billy Rose and be free for a while from one-night stands and tours of America, I would not stand in her way. Naturally, I would be disappointed if she did not return to the company, but I understood exactly how she felt.

When she was well again, she came back to Ballet Theatre for a while, and it was when she was appearing with me at

the Metropolitan Opera House in *Giselle* that Billy Rose saw her dance for the first time. A few days later he came to the Metropolitan again. This time Alicia was appearing in my production of *Pas de Quatre* and I was dancing my role of the Red Devil in *Fair at Sorochintz*. Billy called Alicia the next day and asked her to bring me to lunch. It seemed that now he wanted to engage not only Alicia but me as well for his revue.

I was not particularly anxious to appear in a revue in New York at this time. I was quite happy and contented dancing with Ballet Theatre. I had no wish to leave the company, although I knew that Alicia was not anxious to stay, only because of her operation.

It was my old friend Sol Hurok who persuaded me to go into *The Seven Lively Arts*. He advised me that it would be best for me to stay with Alicia. So, against my better judgment, I left Ballet Theatre and Alicia and I signed a contract to appear in Billy Rose's revue.

At the time I was accused of persuading Alicia to desert the ballet and to cheapen her art by joining a revue. I can't understand why it should be considered vulgar to dance a classical pas de deux in revue, when the same dance performed on the stage of a world-famous opera house would be regarded as the perfection of balletic art. In this instance, it was Alicia who persuaded me to go into revue, strange as that may sound after my varied career in the English music hall. She had become a little weary of constant travel and thought that she would rather welcome a season of at least six months in New York.

We danced an excerpt from Stravinsky's *Scenes de Ballet*,

for which I did the choreography, and it was very gratifying to see the smart after-dinner audience appreciating ballet as part of revue. One of the minor players in the cast was Dolores Gray, who was later to make theatrical history by becoming a star over-night on the occasion of the London première of *Annie Get Your Gun* at the London Coliseum.

That season on Broadway was good for Alicia. She was now a star in her own right in the theatrical firmament, not only in the specialized world of ballet, and she could meet such people as Katharine Cornell and Helen Hayes as equals. She became one of the great names of the American theater, and not just an exotic importation giving brief but sensational appearances at the Metropolitan Opera House.

Alicia is at her best when breaking new ground, so she was overjoyed when, soon after World War II, we were invited to give a series of dance recitals in the Philippines. That meant going by air, Alicia's favorite mode of travel.

She had no fear of flying, and thanks to her early training under Guggy, when she slept to order between pantomime shows at Kennington, she managed to sleep throughout most of the plane journeys which we took together. We traveled hundreds of thousands of miles by air, becoming the most widely-traveled dancers in the world, with more flying hours to our credit than any other members of our profession.

Before our trip to the Philippines we had had some experience of dancing in the tropics. In the spring of 1947 we undertook a Central American tour, covering Cuba, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Panama, Costa Rica, Colombia, and Salvador. In eight weeks we danced in eight different countries. In the autumn of the same year we flew to Mexico for a season during which we could dance only four times a week,



because of the altitude. Following the torrid heat of Chicago, we had to endure winter temperatures in Mexico accompanied by disturbing electric storms.

On returning to the United States we embarked on a twenty weeks' tour, dancing on a different stage almost every night, and spending the best part of the intervening day in the air. Pavlova danced her way round the world, but never at our breathless speed. In one week, London, New York, and Hollywood.

We left San Francisco by air in March 1948, for our Pacific expedition, which proved an unforgettable experience, even in our full and varied professional lives. We spent a week in Honolulu and three weeks in the Philippines, with Manila as our base. We danced favorite *pas de deux* and *pas seuls* from our repertoire without the aid of a supporting company. Our reception was marvelous, one that genuinely touched our hearts.

The Philippines were devastated. The air-raid damage was great, but, even worse was the trail of wreckage left by the Japanese, who literally fought from house to house on these islands. In this land of ruin and rubble, these gallant people were living in a makeshift sort of way, leaving one to wonder why they bothered to go on at all.

They could hardly believe their ears when they heard that we were going to dance for them. It was the first visit of artistes of international standing since before the war, when celebrities on their way to Australia would sometimes stop and give a performance or two, as Pavlova did in 1924, when she danced at the Manila Opera House. No one ever went out especially to perform in the Philippines.

When we stepped out of our plane on Manila airfield we

were welcomed with garlands of gardenias and greeted like royalty. A car was placed at our disposal and Alicia was presented with two native dresses, which she wore at the various functions held in our honor. We danced to a piano accompaniment at the Opera House, on the stage where Pavlova had danced *The Dying Swan* a quarter of a century earlier, but for our open-air performances at the Stadium we appeared with the Manila Symphony Orchestra. Thousands who had never seen ballet hailed our opening performance as the greatest night since the Liberation. Alicia was given a cluster of pearls which the Japs had missed on their looting expeditions, and was begged to have them made into earrings, as a token of their undying gratitude.

Our first provincial engagement was at Beguio, an hour by air from Manila. It was all rather primitive. The auditorium was tiny and the stage, far too small for our requirements, was dangerously slippery. Even rosin seemed to have no effect upon the surface. We rigged up a temporary dressing room which looked rather like a fortune teller's tent at a country fair. We managed to secure a couple of spotlights from the general store and arranged for two Filipinos to operate them. We gave them our gelatine frames and explained how the various items on the program were danced in light of varying color. We might as well have saved our breath, as the light remained blue throughout the entire evening.

At first we were furious, but later regarded the negligence as a compliment. The two boys engaged to work the lights were so entranced by what they saw on the stage that they had eyes and ears for nothing else. They just crouched at the side of the stage and watched us. They had never seen a ballerina in their lives, so that tights, ballet slippers, and Alicia's

*tutu* were something quite new and fascinating to them. When Alicia went up on her *pointes*, they thought they were seeing a miracle.

In Bacolod we danced in heat that was simply overpowering, even at nine o'clock in the evening. "Ballet was never meant for the tropics," sighed Alicia, as she tried to get her swollen feet into her ballet slippers. On the stage, her hand was so hot with the humid heat that she had to rub the palm surreptitiously against her velvet bodice before she extended it to me. Otherwise it would have been impossible to grip it. We both envied the natives who wore no footwear at all.

Once again the audience gasped with amazement as they watched Alicia standing on her toes, or me leaping into the air. Most of them were seeing ballet for the first time, and many were seeing a live show for the first time. Up to now their entertainment had been confined to films. At the end of our Chopin Suite they threw flowers on the stage, and baskets of glorious blooms were handed up to Alicia after the *Don Quixote pas de deux*.

We were practically compelled to give an additional recital, though we found dancing in the heat a grueling experience, but it was impossible to refuse such delightful and enthusiastic patrons.

While we were in Manila we found time to impart a little of our knowledge of the ballet. There were four large dancing schools there, so anxious were the people to learn the classical ballet. We gave a short but intensive course to one of the teachers, leaving her with sufficient material to last her pupils a year. The natives move with a natural grace, so that dancing comes easily to them.

It would be impossible to take a full ballet company to the

tropics by air, as the fares alone would cost a fortune, but we showed what could be done in the way of dance recitals under hastily improvised conditions. We hoped that our pioneering expedition would induce other famous artistes to go out to the Pacific outposts, particularly musicians, who would not be called upon to take a dozen stage costumes, packed as ours were, in specially built lightweight luggage.

It was rather gratifying to look back on the tour when we returned to the States. Before World War I, Diaghileff displayed the balletic gems of Imperial Russia in the sophisticated centers of Europe and America. Now we tried to keep pace with the times and improved modes of transport by taking the ballet to the jungle towns of the Philippines.

We felt that Sergypop would have approved, even though such an undertaking was beyond the wildest dreams of his day.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

# APPLAUSE



I HAVE seen Alicia receive many an ovation from audiences wild with excitement, enthusiasm, and gratitude. I can still hear the cockney pantomime-goers whistling their approval as that tiny child let out a shriek in the death agony of her Salome Dance. Her Blue Bird pas de deux always moved Diaghileff audiences to an outburst of joy, and she won the plaudits of Queen Mary when she danced in *Lac des Cygnes* at Covent Garden. The applause sounded like thunder on the night she first danced Giselle at the Old Vic, and there was almost a riot at Drury Lane when the audience insisted upon cheering her before the curtain without Lifar at her side.

Memorable as were all those receptions, they do not compare with the applause Alicia earned when she really found her feet in the United States. When she danced Giselle at the

Metropolitan Opera House in New York, the final curtain was greeted by something that sounded like a stampede, as the audience screamed their appreciation.

Though Alicia is not susceptible to flattery, her work is definitely influenced by applause. She is the first to admit that she is never good at rehearsal and always nervous in class, but once she gets on the stage, with a crowded audience on the other side of the footlights, she loses all feeling of restraint, inspired as she always is by the people who have come to see her dance.

I am sure that Alicia will never forget how the audience at the Metropolitan helped her in the most critical hour of her whole career by the warmth of their welcome, when she felt almost terrified to make her entrance.

It happened when she returned to the stage after her illness in 1943. In the summer of that year she met with an accident while dancing on the West Coast and, some weeks later, it was discovered that she had ruptured herself and that only rest would cure her. She appeared at the Metropolitan on the opening night of the season but collapsed the following evening during a performance of *Lac des Cgynes*. The next day she had to go to the hospital.

The operation (hernia) was successful, but in order to insure a permanent recovery, she would have to stay in bed for some weeks. For Alicia, that was hell. The longer she remained in bed, the longer it would take her to get back into dancing trim, and there were times, as she lay in her New York apartment, with only her kitten for company, when she doubted if she would ever dance again. As she confided to me, she had reached the very pinnacle of her career,

only to be faced by the possibility that she might have seen the last of her triumphs while still young. It was a ghastly outlook.

Her maestro, Vincenzo Celli, understood how she felt, and made a point of calling to see her regularly after he had given his morning lesson. He told her who had been to class, and what they were doing. He told her of new ballets he had seen, new shows on Broadway that had attracted his attention, and how she would enjoy them when she was up and about again. He kept her mind alert, but, above all, he gave her courage. He banished her blackest fears, assuring her that she would soon be dancing again, though he himself was not sure of this. As Alicia herself has said, Celli inspired her with the *will* to dance. Without his encouragement she probably never would have tried again.

Wild rumors circulated about New York that Alicia would have to give up dancing. No doubt there were some jealous rivals who would have been very pleased to see her on the retired list.

When the wonderful day arrived that she was able to visit Celli's studio, she found half the ballet critics in New York assembled there. It was a terrifying moment, but Celli would not allow her to execute more than three *pliés*, and then sent everybody away. Rather shaken by the experience, Alicia began to wonder whether, even if she danced again, she would ever be able to regain her old perfection. Celli encouraged her, just as a doctor might encourage a patient trying out an artificial limb for the first time, and at last she felt that she could accept Hurok's invitation to rejoin the company on the coast, and dance once a week.

At first Alicia did not attempt to do any of the big adagios, and it depressed her to watch other dancers taking over parts which were hers by right. For the first time in her life she appreciated the importance of good health. She worked on the tour gradually, until she was back in her stride, though she had yet to dance *Giselle* again. Hurok asked her if she would dance it on the opening night of their season at the Metropolitan. She consented to do it, but a cold fear took possession of her as soon as the words were out of her mouth. Would she be able to do it? Could she possibly surpass the performances she had given in the past, or even equal them?

The dreaded night arrived. Sick with nerves, she faced her make-up mirror in her familiar dressing room at the Metropolitan. She had dressed so often for *Giselle* in that very room. Had the magic of those nights gone forever? She had never felt so wretched in the whole of her life, she told me. The music flowed along, getting nearer and nearer to her cue. At last the moment came. Albrecht knocked at the door, and she opened it. The moment those thousands of people saw her, they shouted their delight, and for a few moments there was tumultuous applause.

Alicia was so stunned by it that for a few seconds her mind went completely blank. Then she experienced such confidence as she had not known since her illness. Through their applause, those people had told her that they were delighted to see her back, and that they wished her well.

She went back to her dressing room that night literally walking on air, thrilled with the knowledge that once more she had danced a two-act ballet and that she was still the darling of the New York balletomanes. Her tour of triumph



swept away any bad effects which those months of suffering and anxiety might have left in her mind. The public had assured her that she was still their *prima ballerina assoluta*.

No wonder Alicia loves her public. Even so, she never takes them for granted, which is one reason why every Markova performance is an exhilarating experience for every member of the audience. She regards every gathering of people as an unknown quantity. It is impossible to prophesy how they will react, so she dances with the one idea of captivating them. Imagining to herself that she is meeting them for the first time, she sets out to make a favorable impression and win them over.

No wonder the public love Alicia! She treats them with the greatest respect, whether they are on Broadway or in the heart of Texas. To use Irving's old phrase, she is indeed their "humble servant."

Alicia would never tolerate dirty slippers or tired costumes on the stage. Even in the wilds of the Philippines, in the highest temperature we had ever experienced, she looked fit to make an entrance on an opening night at the Metropolitan.

"I think applause should be encouraged," Alicia says, "not because it flatters one's vanity, but because I think it is good for the artistes and the audience. It never worries me when they applaud in the middle of a ballet, after a variation or an adagio. It is encouraging to have a pat on the back when you yourself know that you have danced particularly well. The classical ballets were designed to evoke applause at certain points. The dancers strike attitudes, and it is quite natural to applaud them before they go on to the next item or movement in the ballet. These breaks for applause are helpful in

giving the dancer time to recover her breath in readiness for the next phase.

"When an audience is swept away by the excitement created by dancers on the stage, they require spontaneous expression of their feelings. It is only natural that they should want to shout 'Bravo' when the ballerina completes a variation which, to use that most hackneyed of phrases, is the very poetry of motion. Applause must always be spontaneous and never asked for by a ballerina who dances her variation in a manner to accentuate the difficulties of her art. She must never say to her audience even mentally, 'Now, watch! Look how difficult this is!' Such an artiste is only fit for the sensationalism of the music hall or the circus.

"If a dance looks difficult from the front, through the manner in which it is executed, the artiste is obviously not ready for the stage. She must go back to the classroom and work still harder before she shows herself in public. In my Diaghileff days I would perform four or five pirouettes in class, but never more than two on the stage. I was taught to give the impression of having great reserves and of being capable of doing far more than I actually did at a performance.

"Students are much too impressed by acrobatics, failing to realize that they cannot begin to interpret a role in ballet if they have to concentrate too deeply upon the technical difficulties involved. The ballerina has to put something of herself into all the great roles, and this is possible only when she is in a position to forget her technique. As Danilova once said to me, 'If our legs don't know where they are going by this time, they never will!'

"I have no patience with dancers who pretend to dislike applause breaking in during the action of a ballet. If they

feel that way about it, they should never appear in a theater, but confine their dancing activities to a studio behind locked doors. Any artiste who steps on to the stage of a theater can no longer expect to be sheltered. She lays herself open to criticism—and applause!

“Just as I think applause should be spontaneous, so should be the ballerina’s curtain call. For that reason I no longer take a flower from my bouquet and give it to my partner. If I do so every time, it loses all significance by becoming a ritual, almost a part of the performance, which is anticipated by the audience. After all, the curtain call is not part of the ballet, but a moment of personal contact between the artiste and her public. It can never be rehearsed or it ceases to be either spontaneous or personal. The custom of the ballerina presenting her partner with a flower has often been ridiculed in the American press, particularly by the cartoonists, who enjoy depicting the dancer unable to snap the stem of the flower she selects. As soon as I saw one of those drawings, I realized that the sooner the custom was discontinued the better.

“Stage doors are another expression of admiration. It is gratifying to find people waiting there, sometimes long after the performance, as it means that the artiste has aroused a lasting interest, an enthusiasm which lives on after the fall of the curtain. It is hardly fair to cheat them by slipping away from the theater by means of another exit door. It is not the right way to foster a spirit of loyalty or devotion in one’s public. There are moments when it requires something of an effort to face the stage-door crowds, but it is just another penalty for being in the public eye.

“Never shall I forget the last night of our 1948 season at

Covent Garden, when we appeared in London for the first time after World War II, dancing as guest artistes with the Sadler's Wells Ballet. The last night was a Saturday. I had given two performances and therefore had not eaten since breakfast-time. I was almost sick with hunger and with the heat, which happened to be very oppressive in London just then.

"As I was moving out of the theater that night, I had to superintend a certain amount of packing and clearing up, which meant that a good hour elapsed before I reached the stage door. The street was solid with admirers. With the aid of the stage-door keeper and two firemen from the Opera House I managed to climb into a waiting car. Once I was safely installed, the crowd surrounded the car on all sides, pressing their faces against the windows and even against the glass panel behind my head.

"Programs and photographs were thrust in for me to autograph. There were hundreds. While it was all very gratifying, there were moments when it was unpleasant, as I felt rather dizzy from want of food, and though I never suffer from claustrophobia, it was rather disturbing to look up and see faces bearing down upon me on all sides. It would have made a wonderful nightmare sequence in a macabre film. My wrist was bordering on collapse as I signed the last program, after thirty minutes of high-speed penmanship.

"When everyone had secured my signature and a few had requested a flower from my bouquets, the car was able to move away. As we proceeded, the crowds divided themselves into an avenue, almost as if they had rehearsed the scene earlier in the evening. As we drove between those two densely

packed lines they cheered and cried 'Come back soon!' I felt a lump in my throat. It was a wonderful moment which I would never have known had I escaped by the front of the house.

"I have never been able to understand why stage-door crowds seem to exist only in English-speaking countries. In Britain, the United States, and South Africa, I have been greeted by masses at the stage door, but never in any other countries, though we have received most enthusiastic applause in the theater after our performance. It was the same with the Diaghileff company. No one ever came to the stage door in Monte Carlo, though the performances evoked scenes of the wildest enthusiasm in the theater."

Apart from the glorious flowers which are presented to Alicia after every performance she has received the strangest expressions of admiration. When, during World War II, it was difficult to get some foods and delicacies, and she was trying to put on weight, Tony, the night stage-door keeper at the Metropolitan, gave her a huge bunch of bananas, which made a strange companion for the exquisite sprays of orchids which were handed to her as the curtain fell on *Giselle*. Ray, the day stage-door keeper at the Metropolitan, would bring an occasional lamb chop as his part of the diet. One of his family did not eat meat, so he passed it on to Alicia, who looked so fragile that he thought she must be undernourished.

When we visited Durban on our South African tour, Alicia was attended by a very fine masseur, who refused to take a fee for his services. Instead, he begged to be allowed to take

a plaster cast of her right foot, which he considered to be perfection itself. He wanted it to be on permanent exhibition in his city, giving as much pleasure as a piece of rare sculpture.

Alicia's dresser had to keep a strict watch on her costumes and accessories, especially when we were on tour, in strange theaters, or improvised town halls. In Cape Town, for instance, somebody stole the white wreath which she wears in the last act of *Giselle*. It was of no value, but such zeal on the part of souvenir hunters could quite easily lead to an embarrassing situation for the ballerina. If *Giselle* had no flower to pluck or the Swan Queen no crown to wear, the ballet would be in a pretty bad way.

I have never asked Alicia what she considered her most cherished token of admiration, but if I were she I would say it was this article which John Martin wrote in the *New York Times* on April 11, 1943. It was headed "Miracle That Is Markova," and read in part:

. . . Markova is the perfect epitome of the classic ballerina. It is not always understood just what this implies. It has nothing to do with how many pirouettes or fouettés or entrechats she can execute; it has equally little to do with her pulchritude or her qualifications as a mate for one of those college boys who annually imagine themselves stranded *à deux* on a desert island. The essence of the classic ballet is the presentation of the highest possible idealization of person, as purely abstract person, unfettered by the limitations of the actual universe, able to transcend its laws at will and of course.

The true classic dancer never tries to deceive you into thinking in terms of the actual; she is not a peasant maid cruelly betrayed in *Giselle*, she is not an erotic gypsy without conscience in *Aleko*, she is not an enchanted princess in *Swan Lake*. She is always and

invariably an idealization of herself, using these characters on so many occasions to demonstrate the wideness of her dominion. . . .

There is no attempt whatever at realism or credibility or any of the concerns of romanticism; there is only the sheer logic of the medium itself, the most complete aesthetic abstraction of which the human body is capable. In the light of this theory, Markova's art stands forth in all its effulgence. It is because she has so instinctive a mastery of formal beauty within these terms that night after night she moves her spectators to such emotion that often they find themselves automatically cheering. Her lightness and brilliance, extraordinary as they are, are only incidental to this larger aspect of her art. No phrase is ever left unfinished, no movement is ever difficult, no subtlety of design is ever overlooked. But the wholeness of the art is more than merely the sum of all these parts. There are things that cannot be understood; like light or air they can be analyzed to the last detail and remain still magic and mystery in experience.





## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

# MAÎTRE DE BALLET



It may come as something of a shock to the ordinary person to learn that a great dancer such as Markova should have a daily lesson from a *maître de ballet*, in her case Vincenzo Celli. He or she probably imagines that she has learned all there is to know about the art of dancing and can rest on her laurels. Nothing is further from the truth. She has, of course, long mastered all the steps, but, like all other great dancers, she still finds it necessary to be watched by someone in authority, in order that she may avoid falling into bad habits or acquiring mannerisms.

When Markova danced in New York, Celli sat in front and went round to her dressing room afterward with a frank opinion of the performance. There was no suggestion of flattery about his remarks, which consisted of an honest account of his observations. If he saw a fault creeping in, he said so,

and at class the next day they worked on that part of the ballet until it was perfected.

A man such as Celli who not only teaches beginners but professional dancers as well who come to him—as a singer goes to an operatic coach for advice and guidance, delights in coaching a rare talent. As in the world of music, where teachers are so often specialists, so in the ballet, dancers choose their ballet masters according to their individual requirements.

Diaghileff changed his *maître de ballet* almost every year, and each time he chose a specialist in a different sphere. When Alicia first joined his company, she was put under Cecchetti, as she needed placing, and her work called for strength and endurance. The next year Legat, who was very alert and quick, gave her that speed and precision which had been essential qualities of the great ballerinas in Imperial St. Petersburg, where he was soloist to the Tsar. During her third year with the Diaghileff company, Balanchine showed her a more modern approach to ballet, and while in Paris, Diaghileff sent her to Egorova, a former Maryinsky ballerina, who gave her a sense of the theater and the grand manner. In the daily classes, Tchernicheva kept her rigidly to the Cecchetti ideals and saw that she lost none of the strength which the old maestro had given her.

When we formed the Markova-Dolin Company, we engaged Nijinska as our ballet mistress, and she gave Alicia a new style and made her even more theater-conscious than ever. After the termination of our company, and before Alicia joined the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, she studied with Anna Pruzina, in London.

Alicia did not dance in public for three months. She had a complete overhaul, something which was not possible while she was working and on tour with our own company. Under Pruzina, she developed the lyrical and plastic side of her work in readiness for the parts she was to dance in Massine's symphonic ballets. In Monte Carlo, she had lessons from Sedova and, later, in the United States, she worked with Spessiva in her New York studio. In Chicago, she and Danilova shared lessons with Novikoff, one of Pavlova's most famous partners. In London, before she danced *Aurora* in 1948, she had lessons with Vera Volkova.

Even from the time of her earliest lessons with Astafieva, Alicia has never depended upon a teacher. In the theater, one sees actresses who give the impression of genius when guided by a particular director. Under the influence of another they emerge as mediocre artists, incapable of a memorable performance. Such a state of affairs would be even more devastating in the ballet, where the dancer must always be in a position to hold her own and to dance with any partner worthy of the name. Her maestro may be three thousand miles away, so if she always has to rely upon him, she will stand a poor chance of making a favorable impression upon her audience.

Alicia has listened carefully to all the various ballet masters, but she has never been completely swayed by any one of them. She has always kept her independence by retaining thoughts and ideas of her own. She can never be classed as So-and-So's pupil on the stage, just as certain photographs, by their style and lighting, proclaim the name of the photographer even before one has had a chance to examine the face

of the sitter. Alicia has tried to assimilate something from each maestro, and upon that she has built her own conception of a ballerina, according to her individual style and approach. She still needs a maestro at her side to assure her that she is within reach of her ideal.

The maestro should be a sure link with tradition. Great teachers such as Egorova, Preobrajenska, and Khessinska all danced in the Imperial theaters of Russia, and know how the classic ballets should be performed. By setting up dance studios in Paris, they have passed on the great tradition to the Western world, so that a young dancer of today can be sure that her Aurora or her Odette is conceived along the right lines.

The maestro has a great responsibility in handing down the choreography of ballets from father to son, so that as little as possible is lost and the production of a ballet today bears a fairly close resemblance to that of the original performance in the last century.

Massine, when he was with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, recorded the choreography of most of the ballets with his own movie camera. At Monte Carlo, where the company did their intensive spring rehearsing for their tours of Europe and America, he had a special projection room to which every new member of the company was taken for preliminary study of the ballets in which they were to appear. Most of the films were made while the company were in practice clothes, though a number of others were taken during actual performances on tour. Special shots of each set were made to complete the record of the production.

In London, Marie Rambert has a vast collection of

privately made films which will prove invaluable to dancers of the future, as they include Spessiva's Mad Scene from *Giselle* and Alicia in a number of Ballet Club productions, almost forgotten, even now.



## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

# BACK TO BRITAIN

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ALICIA was dancing in Mexico City when we received the first intimation that we were going to be asked to return to London to appear with the Sadler's Wells Ballet. We had already had two other offers from England, one of which I was very anxious to accept. That I changed my mind was due entirely to Alicia's good judgment. "No, Patté," she said. "We will wait until we are asked officially to come back to dance with the ballet. Money is not the main object. We must make it a right return in every sense of the word." She was being very sensible. Once again we were in complete accord.

In that summer of 1948 we turned down a \$32,000 contract with Sol Hurok and accepted instead an offer from the Sadler's Wells Ballet Company to appear as guest artistes at Covent Garden dancing in *Giselle*, *Lac des Cygnes*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, and *Les Sylphides*. I was also going to do

one or two performances of *Job*, in which Alicia did not dance.

It was arranged that I should fly to London alone, to make the necessary arrangements, and to discuss technical matters with Ninette de Valois, leaving Alicia to follow by ship. She made her plans so that she would have about ten clear days between landing and making her first appearance at Covent Garden in *Giselle*. She dislikes sea travel, but she thought that she had left herself more than sufficient time to be on top of her form for her new conquest of her native city.

A week before I left New York to fly to London, a cable reached us from the directors of Covent Garden, asking if we would appear at the annual performance for the Sadler's Wells Benevolent Fund at which Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, now the Queen Mother, and Her Royal Highness Princess Margaret were to be present. Under ordinary circumstances it would have been difficult to refuse, but impossible in this case when we should have the honor of dancing before a beloved Queen and Princess who were so interested in ballet. Naturally, we accepted although we knew it was going to be very difficult for us.

I arrived in London two days before the royal performance was to take place. The ship on which Alicia traveled to England docked at Southampton in the dead of night, and a waiting car rushed her to her suite at the Savoy Hotel, where her sister, Vivienne, whom she had not seen since 1939, was waiting for her.

Doris, who had come over from New York with Alicia, stayed behind to cope with the luggage and to get the necessary costumes through the Customs, in order to have them



ready to wear at Covent Garden that night. Mrs. Marks was staying in London, and Bunny, now married and living in Birmingham, was traveling the next day with her baby, Susan, whom Alicia had never seen.

Our hurriedly arranged appearance at Covent Garden was not one of our best performances, as Alicia was still feeling dizzy from the crossing and was conscious of the motion of the ship all the time we danced on the stage. Unfortunately, we had chosen one of the most difficult *pas de deux*, the *Don Quixote* one. However, it provided some grand material for malicious gossip in the Crush Bar. One very well-known critic was heard to say in a loud voice, which was meant to carry to those within earshot, and did to several of my friends, that "Markova was finished, and Dolin had gained—in vulgarity."

The house gave us a warm welcome, though, which helped to lessen our disappointment at the absence of the present Queen Mother, who had had to cancel all public engagements because Princess Margaret was confined to Buckingham Palace, suffering from an attack of measles.

I was sorry that I had persuaded Alicia to make the effort, but she was so happy to be in London again that she soon threw off her depression and eagerly looked forward to her appearance in *Giselle*.

The night of our real return to Covent Garden was something of an occasion. The vast house buzzed with excitement, and I was happy to hear, just before the curtain rose, that Adeline Genée was in the theater. Alicia and I were both extremely nervous, and as we had just come from our engagement in the Philippines, I comforted her by saying that what-

ever else might happen, we need have no fear of being blinded by sweat running into our eyes, which actually happened in Manila. That brought a quick, frightened smile from her as she took up her position behind the door of Giselle's cottage in readiness to make her first entrance.

She gained a certain confidence from the knowledge that her mother was sitting in a box with Bunny, while Vivienne was in another part of the house with Mr. and Mrs. Golodetz, those faithful friends of her childhood. Fortunately she didn't know that Mrs. Marks, who was ill with excitement, had even refused a little brandy, she was so afraid of being sick and disgracing the star of the evening.

The curtain rose. I knocked on Giselle's door. Alicia skipped on to the stage, to receive a welcome that almost knocked her back again. She told me afterward that she was so scared and at the same time so relieved to get her entrance over that she wanted to smile, but discovered that her nerves had brought on a sort of facial paralysis. She tried to smile, but nothing happened. For a second she was terrified that the affliction would spread to her legs and leave her helpless in the center of the stage. But all was well. The music gave her courage. And we danced on the crest of a triumph which culminated in one of the most moving Mad Scenes Alicia has ever performed.

Her sister Bunny saw Alicia dance Giselle for the first time. When she had been in the corps de ballet at Sadler's Wells, she had often appeared in this ballet with her sister, but never realized just how moving it was from the front. It was almost too much for her. As soon as the curtain fell, she slipped back into the dark corner of the box and sobbed her heart out. Be-

low, the house was roaring its approval. Above, the gallery stamped and whistled their agreement. Old friends and new fans joined together to welcome us without reserve. The worst was over. Mrs. Marks, with misty eyes, breathed a long sigh of relief, and then turned to comfort her tearful youngest daughter sobbing in the shadows behind her.

Perhaps a few lines from *Theatre World* illustrates what that Covent Garden audience thought of us:

"Frenzied applause greeted their final curtain—that thunder only heard on historic occasions at the Opera House. Both Markova and Dolin had never been seen to better advantage. It was not necessary to make excuses for them or to wish the younger generation had seen them ten years earlier. They were obviously two of the greatest dancers of our time, now at the peak of their careers. Their ballet partnership is of such long standing that it has developed that same telepathic quality which is a feature of the teamwork of the Lunts in the theater. The merest gesture of one dancer finds a reflection in the other. Their confidence in each other is something to marvel at—a miracle rarely experienced outside the music hall, where trapeze artists take the breath away by the trust they place in each other. Rarely do dancers have the good fortune to partner each other almost exclusively for more than a generation.

"Markova's *Giselle* is still one of the great balletic characterizations within living memory. It is never used as a vehicle to display her dancing technique. The simplicity of the mad scene heightens the pathos, while the second act transfigures her into a vision as ethereal as any lithograph of Grisi or Taglioni. A pure inner flame burns throughout, so that we are ever conscious of the tragic *Giselle* rather than the expert ballerina. Though *Giselle* is a character created by a choreographer, and not by a dramatist, she is, when danced by Markova, as real to us as Juliet or Ophelia."

Some of my readers may think me vain for reproducing this criticism, but as I have eulogized so much about Alicia during the earlier days of our partnership—and with justification—it seems only fitting to include an opinion that was to appear so many years later.

We knew both *Giselle* and *Swan Lake* in their entirety. After all, Markova had been the reason for the first productions at the Sadler's Wells many years previously. She had first danced *Giselle* with me at the Old Vic and later, when *Swan Lake* was produced, Robert Helpmann was her partner. It was not until the summer season of 1935 that I learned *Swan Lake* and thereafter danced it with her many times.

One of the things I shall always remember about Alicia was the rapidity with which she learned *The Sleeping Beauty*. She had a phenomenal memory and added to this blessing the gift of learning a role quickly. There was no time to study this long and exacting work over a period of weeks, even months, as other ballerinas had done. She knew the Rose Adagio and the variation of the second act. She also knew the famous pas de deux of the last act and the solo that accompanies it. That was all. I knew a little more, for I had watched from the wings week after week and learned much from that never-to-be-forgotten Diaghileff production of the same ballet at the Alhambra Theatre in 1921.

Alicia learned this tremendous role in less than two weeks, in addition to dancing two other ballets at the same time. It was an amazing feat, and I doubt whether it has ever been equaled by any other ballerina.

Alicia danced all through the first acts as only she could

dance, but I feel sure she will agree with me that the breath-taking brilliance of the pas de deux in the last act and the diamond, steel-like quality she gave to the *Aurora* variation were the climax of a wonderful *tour de force*.

That engagement at Covent Garden was exciting and challenging. It had not been easy to pick up the threads after an absence of nine years and to dance before a new generation of critical balletomanes who had heard all about us from their elders, but were anxious to pass their own judgment. Two of the leading dancers at Sadler's Wells, Beryl Grey and Moira Shearer, had never seen us dance. They were schoolgirls when we went to the United States. And it was the same with many other younger members of the company.

It was pretty obvious to us that during those years in the States, ballet had increased in popularity in Britain and now appealed to an even wider public than in the days of the Markova-Dolin Ballet. No doubt the war had increased the demand for ballet, as people had found it an ideal medium of escape in those dreadful days. When most of the London theaters were closed at the beginning of the bomb attacks, the New Theatre, the home of the Sadler's Wells Ballet, was packed to capacity.

It was also obvious to us that many people who wanted to see us dance had not been able to get seats for the Covent Garden season, as our appearances there were limited to two or three a week. Certainly the gallery seats were bookable in advance, but very few could spare the time to stand in queues for hours. Feeling that something ought to be done to cater to the thousands of people who still wished to see us dance, Alicia suggested that we should take on a little more pioneer-

ing and give what were to be the first arena performances of ballet in Britain.

Early in 1949 we agreed to dance at the Empress Hall, Earl's Court, for five nights, and we gave a series of dance recitals which were a colossal success. Though the stadium was normally used for ice hockey matches, and though the temperature in London was more conducive to a night by the fireside, we managed to pack the enormous hall. As there was undoubtedly a tremendous audience for arena ballet in London, at the end of August 1949 we appeared at the even bigger Haringay Arena, and drew a total of 40,000 people in five nights. Lower prices of admission made ballet accessible to the masses. The people flocked to see us, and we received shoals of letters begging us to return.

Our appearances at Earl's Court and Haringay shocked the highbrows, who claimed that we were vulgarizing the ballet by dragging that great art to the level of the circus. I can do no better than quote a letter which I wrote to the *Manchester Guardian* as far back as 1937. That paper suggested that Markova had imperiled her artistry by appearing in pantomime at the London Hippodrome during the second year of the Markova-Dolin Ballet, when we were unable to secure a theater in London for our own ballet during the Christmas season. It is as follows:

"This snobbism appalls me. I danced *Espagnol* just as well at the Manchester Hippodrome (then a music hall) under Sir Oswald Stoll's banner as I did at the Opera House when I appeared with the Markova-Dolin Ballet. Markova's performance in *The Nightingale and the Rose* was received with as much enthusiasm by the audience and the critics at the same theater (where she danced it on many occasions with me) as it was recently at the

Opera House. Did Pavlova imperil her art because she appeared at the Palace music hall or danced in a bull-ring? Was the Russian Ballet any less great when, in 1924 and 1925, it was presented as part of a music-hall program at the London Coliseum?

"I would like to point out to your critic that in these days it requires the finest of dancing (not only in the theaters that specialize in and cater for the ballet) to satisfy an audience watching and paying for entertainment. When Markova and I appeared in *Mother Goose* at the London Hippodrome, we gave the audience a strictly classical Tchaikovsky *pas de deux* based as nearly as possible on the original Petipa steps. We were dressed in the strictest of classic *pas de deux* clothes, and the only criticism from the audience who came to see Markova and Dolin dance was that they would have liked more.

"Let me say in conclusion that it takes a very great artist to be a complete success outside the atmosphere and entourage of the ballet, where everything is done to help. This may sound boastful, but in the interests of accuracy, it must be said that both Markova and I have appeared on many occasions without this help and atmosphere and always received at the hands of the audience our full measure of success."

I feel that my words are just as true today. We never cheapened our programs, which consisted of the same *pas seuls* and *pas de deux* which would have been given on an evening of popular ballet at Covent Garden. To the masses at Haringay we gave a full-length version of *Giselle*, the second act of *Lac des Cygnes*, *Casse Noisette*, *Les Sylphides*, and a number of solos, such as *The Dying Swan* and *Autumn Song* for Alicia and Ravel's *Bolero* for me. These works gave countless people a chance to hear some of the loveliest music written by the master musicians and to see some of the finest choreography in the whole repertoire of ballet.

As I stood behind a trelliswork column and watched Alicia

casting her spell over 8,000 people, more than four times the size of a capacity audience at Covent Garden, I knew that we had done the right thing. The cheering people at the end more than confirmed my opinion.

When we succeeded in drawing to the ballet crowds of a size only previously associated with popular sporting events in England, we were naturally able to command higher fees than would have been possible in an ordinary theater. The highbrows again raised their hands in horror and talked of vulgarity. Surely we could still be good dancers, even though we managed to attract thousands rather than hundreds of people a night. Taglioni and Fanny Elssler earned large fees in their day, so did Genée and Kyasht at the Empire, and Pavlova left a fortune of £82,000 in Britain and America, as a result of twenty years' hard work. Surely artistes deserve a good salary after devoting twenty years or more of their life to ballet.

In the spring of 1949 Alicia and I flew to South Africa to give twelve performances and stayed to give forty-eight. The audiences simply overwhelmed us with gratitude. After some appearances they detained us for as long as two hours while we signed programs and they tried to express their appreciation of the joy we had given them. We opened in Johannesburg, where we had to give six extra performances before we moved on to Pretoria, Durban, and Cape Town, where I produced the first full-length *Giselle* seen in South Africa. For this I used a finely trained and disciplined company picked from Dulcie Howes' Cape Town University Ballet and the South African National Ballet directed by Cecily Robinson, who turned out to be one of the best teachers and trainers of corps de ballet that I have ever seen.



Before we left South Africa, we danced in Port Elizabeth, East London, and Bloemfontein, returned to Johannesburg, and then went on to Bulawayo, Salisbury, and Nairobi, where Alicia had to have a cat in her dressing room to catch the mice and prevent them from making their home in her costume baskets.

The whole tour was highly successful.

Unfortunately, the triumph was clouded by a tragic blow that descended upon Alicia unexpectedly. While we were in Johannesburg, she received a cable from her sister Vivienne saying that their mother had died suddenly. Mrs. Marks had been spending a good deal of her time with relatives in Brighton. She came up to London to have lunch with Vivian van Damm and ask his advice about some business. While sitting with him in the canteen at the Windmill Theatre, she said she felt ill. Before lunch was over, Vivian realized that she was seriously ill. He telephoned to Birmingham for Vivienne and Bunny, but before they could reach London Mrs. Marks had passed away in the Charing Cross Hospital. Doris was in Italy acting as manager for Katherine Dunham and her company.

I am very glad that I was with Alicia when the shattering news came. I had known her mother for twenty-eight years. We had first met at Astafieva's, and I had seen a great deal of her during the Diaghileff days when she joined Alicia after Guggy's tragic death. During Alicia's seasons at Sadler's Wells, and throughout the two years of the Markova-Dolin Ballet, I saw so much of her, and grew so fond of her, that she came to look upon me as a son. After all, Alicia and I had grown up together, and Mrs. Marks had been there all the time with that kind smile and quiet optimism which meant

so much to Alicia when her plans failed to materialize as quickly as she would have wished.

That evening, only a few hours after Alicia learned of her beloved mother's death, she had to dance with me in excerpts from the second act of *Giselle*. It was part of our announced program. At that moment I admired Alicia not as the artiste but as the woman. To have to rise from her grave as *Giselle*, to have to descend into it at the end, as the scene demanded, called for a will power and a strength that I had not thought possible. Her *Dying Swan* that evening was danced to and for her mother. At the end of the dance, as Alfred Katz and I helped her to her dressing room, she was on the verge of collapse.

Alicia bore her loss bravely and, true to the trouper's tradition, she carried on, the "humble servant" of her public. It is what her mother would have wished. Loving the ballet so much herself, she would never have approved of Alicia disappointing hundreds of people, especially in a country where ballet was such a rare treat.

Poor Mrs. Marks! She did everything she could to make Alicia the most widely-known ballerina in the world, but that fame which her daughter won only served to keep them apart. As the years went by and Alicia climbed higher up the ladder, she saw less and less of her mother. She was always the most dutiful and affectionate daughter, but the responsibilities of an international career brought about a situation which made it more than difficult for her to spend any length of time with her mother.

Mrs. Marks was very unhappy at times about Alicia. She felt that she was not getting the happiness she deserved. Her

career made such enormous demands upon her that her life had become nothing but work, travel, and living up to her reputation. There seemed to be no time to sit down and enjoy it, as they had hoped in those Diaghileff days when, in some tiny hotel bedroom, they would dream of the time when Alicia would be a *prima ballerina*, occasionally able to rest on her laurels and enjoy some of the luxuries which were then beyond their grasp.

It never turned out quite as they had imagined. When Mrs. Marks joined Alicia in America for a time, no one was happier than she when they stayed together at Danilova's country place in New Jersey. That brief spell really seemed like old times, but ballerinas cannot remain for long in one place, and they, too, soon had to depart to fulfil their respective engagements. Mrs. Marks knew Felia Doubrovska, one of the Diaghileff ballerinas, who was Danilova's neighbor in New Jersey, but it was not the same without Alicia and Choura.

In New York, though Alicia's friends were kind to her mother, paying her regular and frequent attentions, she was lonely. There was no one there who knew her in the old days and who could see Alicia's career in the same light as her friends in England. No one in New York knew the whole story from the Kennington pantomime to the Metropolitan Opera House. She came to see me one day and told me she was going back to England. Sad though she was at leaving Alicia in America, she felt it was best.

"Pat dear," she said, "Alicia is busy. She is famous. Though I know she is always my most-loved daughter, I feel it better that I should go back to London now. I must not be a burden

to her in any way. Her work must come first. That is what I always wanted."

Before Alicia and I accepted the engagement for South Africa she expressed the wish that the air trip to Johannesburg would allow her to stop off in London to see her mother and her sisters. It was not easy, for African Theatres, our managers in South Africa, were becoming impatient and insisting more and more on our immediate arrival.

We flew in from New York and stayed in London a few days before flying on to Johannesburg. Alicia entertained a handful of her really intimate friends in her room at the Savoy. After they had gone, and she was left alone with her mother, she promised to buy her a little house out of the money she was going to make on the South African tour. They would try to find a place not too far from London, probably somewhere near Brighton, so that the family could go down and stay with their mother whenever they could manage to steal a few hours away from their jobs. Also it would be an ideal spot for Alicia in which to rest between tours.

Before we went to South Africa, we fixed the Harringay performances for the end of August and the beginning of September. Alicia wanted to dance at this time in order to be able to spend August with her mother, between the two engagements. By the time she returned to London in August, Alicia was herself the head of her little family.

After Harringay, our first and very happy engagement under the management of Tom Arnold and Clem Butson, we toured some of the larger cities, appearing for two and three

nights in each of them in the largest halls we could engage.

We were now preparing a tour presented by Dr. Julian Braunschweig, following on our reappearance in London at the Covent Garden Opera House. I had had my first discussions with him, on behalf of Alicia and myself. He was very anxious to bring us back again to England to tour the larger cities, either just the two of us, or supported by a small group of dancers. We thought the latter arrangement was best, and once again Gracie Cone, my old teacher and a dear friend of both Alicia and me, was in charge of a small but fine ensemble of dancers whom we took with us on this our first tour of England since 1937.

We opened the tour on September 12, 1949, at Newcastle. Fourteen years previously—on November 11, 1935, to be exact—it had been there that we opened the Markova-Dolin Ballet tour.

By means of a portable stage and steel scaffolding, we managed to erect a theater in each hall, so that our performances were not entirely stripped of that atmosphere which helps to make ballet all the more enjoyable.

In Hull, the City Hall, which holds 1,800 people, was sold out six weeks before we opened. On the previous evening the local paper carried an advertisement offering five guineas for a single seat or standing place.

The audience, typical of the many we encountered on that tour, stamped and waved their programs, and the next day the newspapers reported an "outbreak" of balletomania in Hull. It was the same in every city we visited, whether we danced in a municipal hall or on the stage of a super cinema.



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

# HOME AT LAST



As we were flying back to London at the end of our South African tour, I glanced at Alicia, sitting pensively in the next seat. A book lay unopened in her lap. I had not the faintest idea what she was thinking about. She looked more Sphinx-like than ever. I began to wonder just what her life had given her, apart from an international reputation. Her career had become her life and her life her career, but had it all been worth while?

It seemed to me that she had paid a very high price for her fame. Her childhood pleasures were swept aside as she had prepared to dance Salome for Kennington pantomime patrons. Then came the arduous years of perfecting her technique at Astafieva's as well as with Diaghileff. The period at Sadler's Wells must have given Alicia her first spell of sustained happiness. There, as England's first ballerina in every

sense of the word, she danced the great classic roles for the first time and drew all London out to a suburban theater to be spellbound by the magic of ballet.

Since then she had not had much fun. With our own Markova-Dolin Ballet we were constantly on the move, and by now Alicia must have lost count of the mileage she had covered in Europe, Asia, the Americas and Africa, by land, sea, and air.

It is not easy to maintain an international reputation and, in the case of a ballerina, the sacrifice is great. Alicia never made personal contacts so easily as I did and must often have known the agony of loneliness on those distant tours. Even when we traveled together, there were times when I had to be away from her, attending to business or making arrangements for our next appearance, particularly if it happened to be in an improvised auditorium. She was certainly treated like royalty on our tours, but that is not always an advantage. It can make one's loneliness even more acute. People hesitated to make the first move and speak to her, and as she is shy and retiring by nature, she found it difficult to approach them.

In any case, being constantly with strangers is rather wearying, particularly when, though exhausted with traveling or dancing, one is still expected to behave like a celebrity and put up some sort of show, even off stage. There were times when Alicia longed for those old friends of years' standing—the companionship of Mrs. Haskell, Valia Golodetz, Ninette de Valois, or her own sisters.

Romance crossed Alicia's path more than once. But she was wedded to the dance, perhaps to our partnership. Had



she married, it might have meant her making the greatest sacrifice of all—her art. And perhaps she was never in love enough to make that sacrifice. The hundreds of thousands who have worshiped her dancing, and will go on doing so, must be grateful that so far she has chosen the dance and her God-given artistry instead.

During that first tour of England Alicia was happy. She now knew that though she had been away from England for some years, as I had, she was still the beloved Markova. Other great English names had now taken their place in the firmament of the English Ballet, but Markova was still magic, something unique, intangible. In her own lifetime she had become a legend.

Behind all the outward happiness, though, I could feel a sadness that now, when money was no object, when every comfort could have been hers, a home for her to share, if she so wished, her mother was gone. We made a sad little pilgrimage together to her resting place on the Brighton Downs overlooking the English Channel. Alicia's three sisters were in London now. Bunny was the favorite. Happily married, she had a little daughter, Susan, whom Alicia worshiped. Little Susan was always the center of attraction, and Alicia would willingly take a back seat, listening to her niece telling how the elephants in the Zoo "danced like Auntie Licia."

I think the Christmas of 1949, in some respects, was the happiest Alicia had ever spent, though it was the first after her mother's death. She loved being hostess at the first Christmas party she had ever known in her own home. Always before she had been her mother's guest, or the guest of friends in various parts of the world. It was not a large or an elabo-

rate party, as Alicia hates crowds of people, either under her own roof or elsewhere. A few choice friends, "the friends of years" as she calls them, were chosen to gather round her fireside, to play with Susan's toys, and to talk about the circus, the pantomime, the price of poultry, and the other homely topics which pervade family conversation at that time of the year. As far as I can remember, the ballet was never mentioned. There was no suggestion of a world celebrity entertaining her guests.

One of the guests at the party who gave Alicia infinite pleasure was Dorothy Curnow, who had lived next door to the Marks family many years ago, and who had visited Monte Carlo during Alicia's earliest days with the Diaghileff Ballet. She had watched the momentous career from the beginning.

One of the first things Alicia bought for the new apartment was a radio, as she felt it would be company for Vivienne when she was left alone in town during our tours. That radio has reminded me more than once of Alicia's phenomenal memory. I have been at the apartment drinking coffee, when a certain melody has come over the air. "Listen," Alicia would say, "we used to dance to that with Diaghileff." And she would get up at once and execute the steps on the hearth-rug. Even though she probably had not heard the tune for twenty years or more, she still remembered the steps "word for word."

Alicia now made better use of her leisure than she did formerly. She had what I called her lazy days, when she stayed quietly in her restful little sitting room, sewing ribbons on her ballet slippers, with Taglioni looking down from the wall and a bust of Jenny Lind smiling from those

bookshelves lined with volumes all devoted to the dance in one or other of its varied aspects.

Some years ago, in California, we had a few words about what I called wasting valuable time. We were staying at the Biltmore Hotel. Under the same roof was the Biltmore Theatre where Ethel Barrymore was playing in *The Corn Is Green*. After seeing Miss Barrymore's performance one night, I called on Alicia. She was in her apartment, pottering about, listening to the radio, looking through the window, or browsing over some magazines. Although it was really no concern of mine, I was annoyed.

"Really, Alicia, you ought to be ashamed of yourself," I said, "wasting a whole evening, when, without the effort of leaving the building, you could have seen Ethel Barrymore giving one of the greatest performances of her career. Don't you realize you ought to see other great artistes? She might die and you will have to admit that you never saw her, though you wasted an evening while, under the same roof, she played the best part she has had for twenty years."

Alicia went the next night, and then called me to thank me for having shamed her into going. After that, whenever she had time, especially in London, she tried to see everything that was going on in the theater, appreciating Mary Martin in *South Pacific* as well as Mai Zetterling in Chekov's *The Seagull*.

I remember her visit to *The Seagull* rather vividly. Earlier that evening a journalist had called to interview her, and asked her how her fame had affected her. Failing to think of an answer on the spur of the moment, she begged leave to think it over. He agreed to call back the next afternoon.

When Alicia returned from seeing *The Seagull*, in which Ian Hunter played Tregorin, her eyes were glinting with excitement.

"Now I know what I think about fame," she said, as she began to tell Doris and Vivienne about her night out. "In *The Seagull*, Nina asks the celebrated novelist, Tregorin, what it is like to be famous. He puts my own feelings into words which I could never have found. He speaks about being a *writer*, but it is just the same for a dancer. I must go over to Harrod's in the morning and get a copy of the play to give that young man."

When the journalist returned for Alicia's reflections on fame he was given a copy of *The Seagull* with some lines marked from Tregorin's speech in the second act. They read: "Day and night I am overwhelmed by one besetting idea. I must write, I must write, I must . . . I have scarcely finished one long story when I must at once somehow write another, then a third, after the third a fourth. I write ceaselessly, as though traveling posthaste, and I can't do otherwise. . . . When I finish work, I run to the theater; there I ought to find rest and forget myself, but no, already a heavy cannon ball is tossing in my head—a new subject—and I'm already impelled to the desk, and must hasten again to write and write. And so it is always without an end, and I have no rest from myself."

Such is the life of a famous dancer in a nutshell.

As I once pointed out to Alicia, she would have had a much tougher time as an internationally famous actress. The dancer has many advantages over the actress, though her career may not be so long. The dancer has no language bar-

rier. She can move an audience profoundly without being able to speak a single word of their language. Nor is the ballerina ever desperate for a new vehicle, while the actress is always searching for new plays.

I remember meeting Gertrude Lawrence when we were both making a two-hour journey out of New York. I was delighted she was on the train, as no one could wish for a more congenial traveling companion. She realized that I expected we'd travel together, and hastily explained why she wanted to be alone.

"Tony," she said, "*Pygmalion* is coming off, and I am at my wit's end to find a new play. I've brought two scripts with me to read on the train, and I must finish them before I get to Philadelphia."

The ballerina never experiences such an acute agony of mind. She learns a repertoire consisting of *Giselle*, *Casse Noisette*, *Lac des Cygnes*, and others, and as long as she dances them well enough, the public is content to come and watch her for a lifetime. Even when the actress feels she has found a winner, she may eventually discover to her dismay that the public doesn't agree with her choice. The ballerina, on the other hand, if she is of Markova's status, knows that her *Giselle* will always be a sellout. She is never at a loss for a vehicle and a successful one, at that.

Markova will never suffer from a sense of frustration and failure. If she never dances in another new ballet, she has the satisfaction of knowing that she can always set out from Knightsbridge or her apartment in New York upon a financially successful tour whenever she feels inclined to slip her lovely slender foot into a ballet slipper.

Since that opening night in Newcastle of September 12, 1949, Markova and I have danced together in London, the cities of Great Britain, and in Monte Carlo. We gave our last performance together in Glasgow on Monday night, October 1, 1951. Just before the performance began, Alicia was practicing on the stage. The orchestra was playing the overture to the first ballet. She was dancing happily, "warming up." She leaped off the floor only to land on a slippery spot. The agonizing pain warned her that she had damaged her ankle. Knowing that I was worried about the illness of another dancer in the company, she did not tell me of her fears but carried on and danced the two exacting acts of *The Nutcracker*. I could feel that she was saving herself and thought that, as can happen to anyone, it was not a good night. But it was much more than that: she was unable to dance for ten more weeks of the tour. The company, however, had to carry on, and tragic though the loss of its star was, carry on we did. Now it was no longer the two of us, but a company of young dancers all working and striving to take their place in English Ballet, just as Alicia and I had done years before.

Markova returned to the company, to dance again *The Nutcracker* on the opening night of our season at Monte Carlo, her first re-appearance after being incapacitated for more than two months. She looked radiant. I could not dance with her on that opening night. During our years of partnership there have been very few times when I have not been able to partner Alicia. Two days later she left Monte Carlo. Her foot had not had time to heal.

I felt that I must stand by the company. For months I had known nothing else but rehearsals, productions, and the work that goes into the building up of a ballet company. Once before I felt it was right that Alicia should go off on her own. This time, however, it was determined by the command of her physicians to give her ankle ample time to heal. In all, we have been too dependent on each other. From the point of view of her career, it was once the best move she ever made, to go off independently. Now she has decided to do the same thing again.

How can one ever conclude the last chapter of a biography of Markova? Forever in the annals of the dance her name will be memorable, irreplaceable, and never to be forgotten. Not only in the pages of Ballet has she imprinted the perfection of her "pointes" but also in the hearts of many she has left an indelible picture of herself, a lithograph of rare beauty and security, that will take its place with those of yesteryear.

As I close this book, I know that Alicia is happy. She has made in New York in the fall of 1952 a triumphant return to Ballet as a guest artist. As they did before, the New York critics have again acclaimed her. The words are as true today as when I first said in 1934: "Markova is the first ballerina of England, and maybe of the world!" As I began this book, I called it in my mind: "Markova, the story of a great ballerina, by Anton Dolin, written with love and affection. . . ." and so it has been.











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